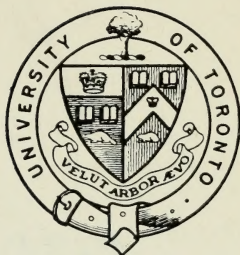




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DAILY IN THE WAR

SIDNEY LOW



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**ITALY IN THE WAR**

**THE REIGN OF QUEEN VICTORIA**

**1837-1901**

**By SIDNEY LOW, M.A.**

Fellow of King's College, London, formerly Scholar of Balliol College, Oxford,

**And LLOYD C. SANDERS, B.A.**

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**LONDON, NEW YORK, BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, AND MADRAS**





ARTILLERY ABOVE THE SNOW-LINE



# ITALY IN THE WAR

BY  
SIDNEY LOW

*WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS AND THREE MAPS*

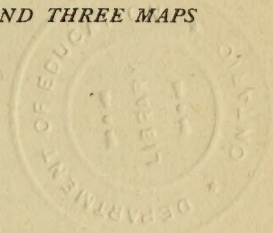
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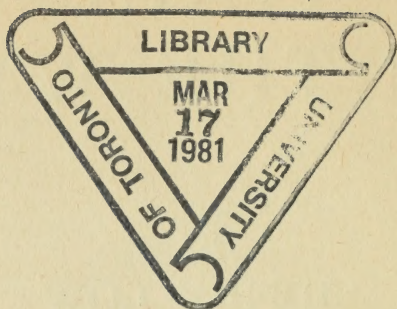
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## PREFACE

**I**N June and July, 1916, I visited the theatre of war in Italy on the invitation of the Italian Headquarters Staff. I spent some time at various sectors of the Front, and had opportunities also to examine certain of the industrial establishments engaged in the production of war material, and in other ways to obtain some knowledge of the methods by which Italy has organised herself for the maintenance and supply of her armies in the field.

The following chapters embody the opinions formed, and the information gathered, in this tour of inspection. I have added a brief discussion of the causes and motives by which Italy was impelled to participate in the world conflict, and a summary of the diplomatic and political transactions leading up to the declaration of war against Austria.

I was profoundly impressed by what I saw and

heard, and it is my hope that I may have succeeded in conveying to my readers something of my own appreciation of the spirit and energy with which Italy has faced her ordeal.

It was an honourable privilege to be permitted to observe, at close range, the young army of an old and famous people, locked in its struggle with a formidable antagonist. Nor could the observer fail to be stirred by these grandiose warlike operations amid scenes that make so moving an appeal to the historic and artistic imagination: carried on as they were under conditions of exceptional and excessive difficulty.

Italy has borne the strain with patriotic ardour and high courage, and she has done valuable service to her allies no less than to herself. She has earned the gratitude and respect of the great nations with which she is associated in the vindication of liberty and justice; and her well-wishers have good ground to expect that she will emerge from the contest with her national and racial unity complete, and with her political and economic stability more securely established.

I regret that I am precluded, by military exigencies and regulations, from referring by name



to those courteous and capable friends by whom I was escorted, advised, and protected in my travels over the war-zone. As it is, I can do no more than express, in general terms, my cordial acknowledgment of the kindness shown to me by the officers of the Comando Supremo, and those of the armies, divisions, and regiments with which I was brought into contact. To their willing and judicious aid, and the facilities they gave me, such interest as there may be in these pages is mainly due.

I am under particular obligations to the chiefs of the admirable Photographic Department of the Italian Headquarters Staff, who have been good enough to place at my disposal the photographs from which the majority of the illustrations in this volume are derived.

S. L.

LONDON, *October*, 1916.



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## ERRATA

- |             |     |             |     |   |
|-------------|-----|-------------|-----|---|
| <i>Page</i> | 52, | <i>line</i> | 12. | For "1915" read "1916."   |
| "           | 129 | "           | 5.  | For "Conrad" read "Konrad."                                     |
| "           | 160 | "           | 8.  | For " <i>ideale</i> " read " <i>ideale</i> ."                   |
| "           | 283 | "           | 25. | For "neutralist" read "nationalist."                            |
| "           | 289 | "           | 11. | For " <i>Resorgimento</i> " read " <i>Risorgi-<br/>mento</i> ." |





# ITALY IN THE WAR

## CHAPTER I

### NORTH AND SOUTH

WAR AND NATIONAL CHARACTER—SOME MISCONCEPTIONS—THE LATIN TEMPERAMENT—THE ORDEAL OF FRANCE—THE CALMNESS OF ITALY

UNDER the plastic touch and fiery breath of war the characters of nations, like the characters of men, have been swiftly moulded to new forms. Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to call the process not so much a development as a revelation. Few of us there are who have not been moved by this strong and subtle magic, as it has manifested itself on individuals and classes in these years. We have seen the soul awakened where often we thought the soul was dead, and have had cause to marvel anew at the strange contradictions, the infinite possibilities, that lie hidden beneath the mask of personality. If some figures, shining with light and splendour, have been transformed, as by Ithuriel's spear, to

shapes loathly or despicable, how many others have been clothed with a starry radiance !

We live in an age of heroes and martyrs, born under our own roofs, bred up in our households. The boys we saw the other day in the playing-fields are the knightly young leaders of our battles, wise, valiant, alert, indomitable. The idler of the club and the music-hall endures without a murmur the misery of the trenches ; the comic actor who capered for our pleasure has become the war-hawk on wings of air, dying as he hurls the thunderbolt. The work-a-day toilers from field and factory and office, grumbling over their daily task, are the warriors who go to their graves like beds with a jest between their teeth. The girls who lived, it seemed, to dress and flirt, are scrubbing the floors of the hospitals, or staining their arms in the munition works. Most of us, in our several degrees, have drawn upon unexpected reserves, have found ourselves sometimes unhappily worse, but more often rather better, than we deemed that we could be.

\* \* \*

So it is with the nations. In the war the outward vesture of convention and tradition has fallen away, and spiritual values are unveiled. The generalities so lightly repeated are shown to be inæccurate and shallow. Not in one country

but in many has the revelation come, and not always is it welcome. With a shock we faced the stark brutality beneath the German veneer of sentiment and culture. We have learnt much concerning our foes, but more of our friends, as they also have gained a surer knowledge of us. We know how deeply we misjudged the Latin peoples when we thought them wanting in the purposeful steadiness we chose to ascribe to our Northern stocks. We liked to believe the gaiety that blossoms under bluer skies than ours to be mere frivolity, the vivaciousness that goes with clearer airs and easier tongues a symptom only of instability and fickleness.

The Germans, who are experts in everything except human nature, strangely misconceived the psychology of peoples. They thought the British slothful and effete, the French decadent, the Russians doltish, the Italians unadventurous and soft. These were disastrous errors ; but we too make mistakes in our hasty analysis of national and racial character. We, who ought to know something of our own fitfulness and caprice, who have lived to see the Teuton intellect break up in brain-storms of insolence and hate, we acquiesced in the tradition of the superficiality and levity of the Latin peoples. We found the French wanting in seriousness, a strange misunderstanding of the countrymen of Bossuet and Corneille, of Montes-

quieu and Pascal. We thought the Italians volatile and temperamental, a nation merely of singers and artists, though it is the nation of Machiavelli and Galileo, Mazzini and Cavour.

This misconception was held unquestioningly by the Germans and their ally. One of their journals, soon after the declaration of war against Austria, sneered at the army of "mandoline-players, beggars and brigands" which would presently, it was suggested, run howling before the conquering legions of the Hapsburg emperor. The taunt was widely quoted and sank deep. Shortly after the victories on the Isonzo an Italian paper published a cartoon in which the Austrian Kaiser, much battered and shaken, is seen hobbling away under a shower of musical instruments pelted upon him by pursuing bersaglieri. "Rather too many mandolines," murmurs the disturbed potentate. The Austrians had never been able to believe that there was any real fighting quality in the troops of the South.

But indeed this myth of the weakness, the adorable weakness, of Italy was common to the world at large. Italy is so beautiful, it is so rich in the treasures of art and the glories of nature, it is so gemmed and jewelled by the hand of man and the hand of God, it is altogether so exquisite and delectable that it is not easy to treat it quite like the rest of this hard, prosaic, practical, materialistic,

latter-day Europe. For generations Italy has been the chosen haunt of the Sentimental Traveller, the paradise of the literary and artistic holiday-maker. It is the Italy of Byron and Shelley, of Goethe and Heine, of Stendhal and George Sand, of Landor and Browning, that we know best, the Italy of the pictures and the palaces and the Vatican galleries, the Italy of the purple hills and sapphire seas : the land of song and music and verse, the " woman country " that inspires her alien lovers with an undying passion.

" Open my heart and you shall see  
Graved upon it, Italy."

Yes ; but the Italy of the past, the Italy of a dream, of many dreams.

\* \* \*

For there is another, a living, Italy, an Italy *de nos jours*, which resents this patronising homage. If Italy is the woman nation she is feminist in the modern way, the way that leads to experience activity, adventure. To lie passive and lovely, while wealthy people (who have made their money in trade) rhapsodise and domineer over her, is not to her mind : she will be up and doing herself. Young Italy, braced by the invigorating waters of the *risorgimento*, still stirring with the flush of adolescent nationhood, rebels under this worship of her ornaments and her charms.



Not without significance is it that Italy gave birth to the Futurist movement, with its savage repudiation of the Past, its angry dislike for all that is traditional, romantic, sentimental. The thing may be not only extravagant but merely artificial elsewhere. In Rome, Milan, Bologna, it has some root of meaning. "We are tired," say the young Italians, "of all this historic and æsthetic adoration; we have heard enough of Petrarch and Boccaccio and Botticelli, of Cimabue and Fra Angelico. We cannot live for ever on memories of Virgil and Tasso and Francesca da Rimini. Let those who will dream in museums and old churches; for us the clanging factory, the beating hammers, the tall chimneys, the throbbing engines, the clamorous cities and crowded streets where things are done and the new world is being shaped. Away with your Past; we are of the Future—as Italy, too, shall be."

Philosophic publicists write books on "the deeper causes of the war."<sup>1</sup> I think that this reaction was one of the deeper causes of the war for Italy. Behind all the political motives was this sentiment of self-consciousness, this feeling that the time had come for Italy to show that she was one of the family of great modern nations, vigorous and alive, a country to interest statesmen

<sup>1</sup> Hovelacque: *Les causes profondes de la guerre.*



and capitalists as well as tourists and antiquarians. “*Meno alberghi, più officine,*” exclaimed the late Premier, Signor Salandra: “we want fewer hotels and more factories.” D’Annunzio gave voice to the same indignant revolt against impotence and dependence when he said in the great week of May, 1915: “We will no longer be a museum of antiquities, a kind of hostelry, a pleasure resort, under a sky painted over with Prussian blue, for the benefit of international honeymooners.” Well might the audience shower roses on the orator! Well might Italians say to themselves: “They think us powerless—we who are the inheritors of Rome! They hold us idle and weak—we whose labouring hands have built the roads, the railways, the harbours of the world. They think us light and changeful—though for a century we have held fast to an ideal, to the ideal of a Greater Italy, which now we shall live to see fulfilled.”

\* \* \*

To pass from Britain to the Latin countries in the early days of June 1916 was a lesson for anybody disposed to accept the traditional valuation of national qualities. I left England still in that stage, which lasted too long, of the strong man rousing himself from sleep. The giant was indeed beginning to shake invincible locks; we who knew

him knew he would not rest again until the task was done. But all the same, the England I had left was unquiet and anxious, even while muddling on, in its own inimitable fashion, towards effectiveness and victory. At the moment our optimism was chequered with depression. We had gone through those bad weeks of the Irish rising, the shelling of insurgent strongholds in the heart of Dublin, the shooting of the rebels, the raiding of German cruisers and Zeppelins, the surrender of Townshend's army at Kut, the loss of the Mediterranean flagship, the sudden tragedy of Kitchener's death. The Battle of Jutland had been fought, but we did not yet quite know what to make of it. London felt the irrepressible animation and sanguine vitality of the young soldiers in her streets. But under the surface there was uneasiness : we were not so calm and confident as we wanted to be.

In France one breathed a different atmosphere. The French, "our lively neighbours," were not lively ; but tranquil, restrained, sedate. They had suffered much and knew that great sufferings were still to come ; but they faced the future with an invincible fortitude. The Gallic vivacity had given place to a new reticence ; there was not much talking in the public places and little laughter ; work was done quietly and soberly, but done it was. Few young men were to be seen except soldiers in uniform, and those too often wounded. But the

old men, the women, even the children, saw to it that the life of the country went on behind the line of steel which held back the invading host, and made certain that after the tempest France should still be as she has been, rich, thrifty, industrious, artistic, able to hand down to the generations to come all that has been derived from an incomparable past.

One recognised this even in Havre, that outpost of England, full of clean, cheerful soldiers in khaki, of smart young British officers. Havre was not wholly absorbed in the activities of the war. The shops in the wide well-kept streets were doing a brisk business, the tramcars with women conductors were always full of passengers. In the centre of the town there is a pleasant public garden, and I noticed that the lawns here were carefully mown and tended, the paths swept, the parterres bright with geraniums, carnations, and roses. Outside there were men at work repairing the roadway and pavements. Even in the stress of war it is not well to lose all sense of values or to become slovenly and tasteless.

It happened to be a Confirmation Day at Havre, and one saw many family groups gathered about some virginal young figure in lawny and spotless white. Sometimes the aspirant would be accompanied by a father or elder brother in uniform, grave, bearded, often middle-aged ; nearly always

there was a mother or a sister in that nighted garb of mourning which one Frenchwoman out of every three wears. Cast your eye anywhere in France and it falls upon those draped and hooded figures, on those serene and spiritualised faces, subdued by sorrow and faith to new expressiveness and beauty.

And everywhere in France, from the Channel to the Alps, the prevailing note is the same: an intense seriousness, a silent endurance, an untiring industry, a faith unshaken. You do not hear much war-talk; the time for talking has long gone by. Nor do they sing hymns of hate, or put into words their bitterness against the enemy who exulted in the atrocious hope of bleeding France to death. The day of vengeance has not yet dawned: when it comes I think France will not forget or forgive. Meanwhile she shows that she is far indeed from being *saignée à blanc*. The red blood is pulsing in her veins, and all her energies are at the stretch to keep the economic and social fabric intact.

How successful the effort has been even the transient visitor can see. The fields are tilled, the vines are pruned, new hives of industry, warlike and peaceful, are swarming, there is no sign of scarcity or want: the regular processes of life seem to go on with surprisingly little change and interruption. It is a triumph of systematic organisation, backed by thrift and labour and a passionate patriotism.

In Italy one felt a lighter air. It was grey and clouded weather as I travelled southward from Paris, such as we had in Western Europe all through that rain-washed spring and early summer. But in the morning I looked out upon sunlit valleys and great hills shining in the dawn ; and presently we had passed through the gateway of the Alps and were out upon the green Piedmontese plain, with its flanking crescent of snow-crowned mountains. As one rolled through that busy and fertile land the oppression that had weighed ceaselessly upon us all for twenty-two months was lifted, and for moments the war seemed far away. And so in a sense it was. Up there in the waste places of the frontier it was eddying and seething ; but down in the cultivated and populous provinces of the great river-basin there was the tranquil and secure atmosphere of peace.

Italy, it was evident, had not felt the war as France has or even England. The conflict had not bitten so deep into the fibre of the nation's being, nor so absorbed its consciousness. Often in that first journey through Piedmont, and Lombardy, and the Veneto, to that charming little Friulian town of Udine which was my destination, and often afterwards, I drifted back into the mood which is natural to the northern traveller in Italy, the mood of him who is here but to enjoy and to admire. Slaughter and strife—how think of them in these



arcaded streets, with the deep shadows, and gracious portals, and fluttering curtains shutting out the sun from dim little shops? Or in those daughter-towns of Venice where the eye falls entranced upon feudal turret and half-pagan temple, and the slant of red-brown roofs cutting across the changeless blue? Among these rose-clad villages where the yoked white oxen pace solemnly by the olive groves? Or in those chattering market squares where fruit and flowers, in heaps of glowing colour, lie on the stalls before peasant girls who might have stepped straight from the canvases of Bellini?

\* \* \*

It was the week when Cadorna's great army of reserve was gathering from many quarters to thrust back the Austrian drive down the Trentino; and yet in many ways things seemed strangely, almost unnaturally, normal. There were many soldiers in the trains, hot and dusty, with young ladies to give them water at the stations. But the service was not much delayed, one suffered no special inconvenience, porters, cabs, restaurants were discharging their functions. In Turin, except that there were officers and soldiers on all sides, things seemed to be going on almost as usual. One did not grope in obscurity after sunset as in London and Paris. The lights were brilliant in the Corso Vittorio Emanuele and the Corso Umberto, the



shops were open late, idlers sauntered in the streets under the midsummer moon, or listened to music in the cafés till far into the night. The great, rich, pleasure-loving city seemed very much itself, and war had not appreciably disturbed its prosperous content.

Later, when I visited the industrial works, especially the wonderful munitions and transport factories, I knew that Turin, with all its outward ease and enjoyment, was throwing its energies into the tasks of equipment and supply for the armies at the Front. Its aspect, and that of other large towns, and of the countryside in general, is typical of the manner in which Italy takes her war. Before the decision was reached there was plenty of excitement and agitation of which something will be said later.<sup>1</sup> But the Italians, having decided, adapted themselves to the new conditions with surprising smoothness, and had no notion of allowing themselves to be shaken beyond what was necessary out of their habitual courses. Every requisite sacrifice was made: the whole nation gave up its white bread without a murmur, and was now, from prince to peasant, eating brown loaves and rolls. There is no real reason why white bread should not be eaten by those who can afford it, and as a matter of fact it is little dearer and no

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chapter XV.

better than the brown. But this excellent war-bread is a symbol that all classes are sharing in the national effort, and that rich and poor alike are under the same obligation. Nevertheless they do not see why, when proper provision has been made for the needs of the fighting forces, they should not, so far as possible, apply themselves to their customary interests and even their customary pleasures.

In the book-shops—there are about as many in any third-rate Italian town as would serve a million of Londoners—I did not see many war-books ; but, on the contrary, works on economics and science, sandwiched between thick layers of miscellaneous fiction, from translations of Paul de Kock and Dumas to Raffles and Sherlock Holmes.

Women, as I presently found, were beginning to do their part in making munitions, and in some places acting as tram-conductors, ticket-collectors, and office clerks. But they had not taken men's places so largely and diversely as in England and France, and, I suppose, Germany. In the clubs and restaurants your viands are still served to you by male attendants. Waiting at table is man's work in Italy, and there is a rooted belief that this is an art the feminine brain cannot master. The only woman chauffeur I saw was an English girl driving one of those Red Cross motor ambulances which have rendered such admirable service to our

allies. In Turin there were plenty of young or youngish men out of uniform; theatres, picture shows, and other places of recreation were doing excellent business; money was as plentiful as it is in other belligerent countries, for indeed one immediate effect of war is to pump a stream of gold from national treasuries into private pockets; and here it was spent openly and without reserve.

Italians are very much in earnest about the war —“our war” as they call it. But they do not allow themselves to be obsessed or flurried by it: they keep their heads. This equanimity is due in part to the conditions under which the campaign is carried on. But also it has deeper causes. The Italians are idealists, but they are not sentimental; they face facts, and they distinguish between objective realities and phantoms of the imagination, keeping the two things apart and in their places with a kind of artistic remorselessness, which is a little puzzling to us, who are apt to mix them together in our large, confused, romantic northern fashion. If they have gone to war for an idea, the idea of a greater Italy, they have applied themselves to the practical business before them with a coolness extremely characteristic of the Latin intelligence, so calculating, clear-sighted, and precise, under its outward garb of vivacity and impulsiveness.

## CHAPTER II

### TO THE EASTERN FRONT

AUSTRIAN AIR-RAIDS — WANTON RAVAGE AT  
RAVENNA—THE FAILURE OF “FRIGHTFULNESS”  
—MEMORIES OF ROME AND VENICE—AQUILEIA  
—THE DELECTABLE LAND OF FRIULI—UDINE  
AND THE ISONZO COUNTRY

**I**F Turin was lighted at night, the towns that lie nearer the war-zone were dark enough. Milan, Brescia, Verona, Vicenza, Padua, Mantua, Venice, and other cities of the plain and the coasts keep their lamps low, and draw the shutters close over their windows. For if the Austrian guns cannot reach them the Austrian aeroplanes can, and they have been exposed to many attacks from the corsairs of the air.

The assailants have been indiscriminating in their attentions, and though occasionally they have sought to wreck a fortress or an arsenal they have devoted themselves much more frequently to the harassing of undefended towns and peaceful centres of population. Few military results of value have been attained, and the destruction of

civilian life has been inconsiderable. The victims, as elsewhere, have been chiefly women and children. At one place I visited the raiders plumped a bomb into the middle of a crowded market square, killing and injuring a score of persons, shopkeepers and peasants from the neighbouring villages.

All the world has hoped that the intellectual tragedies of Ypres and Rheims would not be repeated, and that the matchless art treasures of Northern Italy would escape the ravages of the latter-day Vandals. For the most part they have done so. Venice, swathed in sand-bags and protected by hoardings of brick and timber, has been bombed frequently but on the whole ineffectively, though it has lost fine churches and one of the best of Tiepolo's pictures. This latter masterpiece will not be keenly missed by the tourist, for it was in the Chiesa degli Scalzi, on the Grand Canal, a church near the station and seldom visited. Nor perhaps was it ruined in the mere lust of destruction, for on the rails hard by a train of munitions was standing, and at that, let us hope, the Austrian aviator was aiming.

No such excuse can be made for the assault on the cathedral of St. Apollinare at Ravenna, with its unequalled mosaics, those triumphs of early Christian art, that glowed and glistened on its walls as fresh and brilliant as when they were pieced together by cunning hands thirteen cen-



turies ago. The cities richest in memorials of the past seem most to tempt the German and Austrian ravagers. Yet of these some, even when they are not fortresses, are within the zones of war or not far removed from places that may have a military or economic significance. But Ravenna, dead this thousand years, that haunt of memory and silence ! Ravenna, watching over its monuments and tombs, dreaming among the pines of its brief, forgotten reign of splendour ! To pour bombs on the deserted city of Placidia and Theodoric was an insult to the ghost of fallen greatness.

“ We do it wrong, being so majestic,  
To offer it the show of violence.”

Happily, though much damage has been done, the mosaics are not injured past redemption. The cultured realists of the armed empires, in their fury against the relics of past civilisations, have not often found their power equal to their malice.

Hospitals, too, are the objects of their attention in Italy as elsewhere. Several have been attacked, and in some cases clearly with premeditation. There is one, a great block of white isolation wards and galleries, standing apart from other buildings, which could not easily be taken for anything but what it is, even without the red cross blazons conspicuously displayed upon its roofs and walls. The Austrians threw bombs on this and got the





*"Sphere" photo.*

THE MOSAICS IN S. APOLLINARE NUOVO, RAVENNA



customary bag of blameless victims : a couple of nursing sisters killed and others wounded.

This aerial frightfulness is taken very calmly. The exposed towns of Lombardy and the Veneto have been visited so frequently that the business of receiving hostile aircraft has settled down into a kind of routine. As the Austrians use aeroplanes, not airships, they do not often fly by night, preferring the morning hours for their excursions. I was present on several occasions when these attacks took place, and found them, as the local populace does, more interesting than alarming.

A very complete vigilance service has been arranged, with watchers stationed on some lofty point of observation, if there is no kite-balloon or "sausage" anchored near at hand. As soon as the observer telephones that an enemy avion is approaching, three cannon shots are fired, and a siren sounds a long shrill note of warning. The sudden arrest of out-door activity which ensues is curious. Tram-cars are left standing on the rails, and autos in the roadway; the shop-keepers pull down their iron-bound shutters; the stalls in the market-place are hastily deserted; the carabinieri drive all wayfarers from the pavements and piazzas; everybody seeks the shelter of colonnades and doorways, or watches (contrary to regulations) from courtyards and open upper balconies.

Presently you see a speck far up in the blue vault of the sky, which grows larger till it is like a black insect ; and round the insect there dance white puff-balls, which are the bursts of shrapnel from the anti-aircraft guns. Then, like a flight of wild ducks, three, four, five of our own Capolani and Farmans go streaming towards the intruder, the sun flashing from the green, white, and red tricolour painted on their burnished planes. We watch them rising skywards, till they approach the black insect, which turns and goes, with or without leaving a visiting-card in the shape of a bomb somewhere in the outskirts. The syren emits a joyous howl. "*È finito*," says everybody ; and the passengers climb back into the trams, the tradesmen reopen their shops, and Pietro and Battista return to their market-stalls and the serious affairs of life. Business is business ; and one must get the best price for one's lettuces and polenta in spite of superfluous interruptions.

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You begin your examination of Italy's campaign in that north-eastern corner of the country from which it started. The Italians forced the fighting on the day after war was declared, May 24, 1915, in the wedge of country from the Adriatic and the Carnia mountains, between the old Austrian fron-

tier, now rubbed off the map, and the Isonzo, which glides down to the Gulf of Trieste in front of the spurs of the Julian Alps and the great Carso upland. It is a sequestered and little known land, this Friulian annexe, a land of peasants and vine-dressers on the inner levels, and of fishermen down by the sea: little known to the tourist who glances upon it out of the carriage window on his way through to the Dolomites; neglected by the artist though it should be full of temptation for him; unattractive to the men of commerce, for it has been part of Austria's policy to keep the east-and-west communications, the roads and the railways, poor and bad, lest Venice should draw away trade from Trieste and Fiume.

Yet it is a land full of beauty and of memories, famous in the days of imperial Rome, close to the heart of Venice, when that was a seat of empire too. On her side of the border, Austria, since she could not Germanise or Magyarise the district, did her best to overwhelm its Italian-speaking population with immigrant Slovenes. Here, if nowhere else, she patronised and favoured the Slavs, not from love of them but as a counterpoise to the Latins.

She has small interest in the things that recall the city of the Cæsars or the city of St. Mark. Down among the rice-fields of the Natisone, a few miles from the seashore, which has been pushed



forward through the centuries by the silt of the river, lies Aquileia, a solitary, decayed, forlorn little provincial town. It should have been a shrine to attract the pilgrims from all the world, as it will be now that the Italians have regained it and will treat it with the reverence it deserves. It will become, I think, one of the great centres of artistic resort in Italy, for there is no more interesting place, none richer in memorials of Imperial Rome. The Austrian officials plundered the local museum of many valuable small objects before their flight last year; but this museum—it bears the inscription *Museo Nazionale* now—has still such a wealth of Roman statues, busts, bronzes, and ornaments as are scarcely to be met with elsewhere. Systematic exploration and excavation may make of it almost another Pompeii.

Before it was sacked by the ferocious legions of the Huns—the real Huns under Attila—in the fifth century, Aquileia was a far larger and finer city than the pleasure town by Vesuvius. It was the favourite residence of Augustus and Diocletian and several other emperors, the *splendidissima colonia* of Rome, the chief outpost fortress and naval station of Italy on the east, the head-quarters of the Admiral of the Adriatic, the emporium whence the trade routes branched off into Pannonia and Illyria. It was one of the great cities of the western world, and was said to have a circuit



of twelve miles within its walls and half a million inhabitants. Augustus made it his head-quarters, whence he directed the campaign of the legions under Tiberius and Drusus. He found Aquileia a convenient centre, "so that," as Suetonius tells us, "he might be close at hand, or at any rate not far off when there was war with the Germans and Pannonians." Thus it goes on through the ages. "Étranges recommencements de l'histoire," writes M. Gabriel Faure, "qui, à vingt siècles de distance, rapproche, à quelques kilomètres, les quartiers généraux d'un empereur romain et d'un roi d'Italie, dans l'éternelle lutte des Latins contre les barbares du nord."

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Venice, the inheritor of Rome in these parts, took over Aquileia, repaired the ravages of Huns and Lombards, and left her mark upon it in a beautiful mediæval basilica and interesting mosaics. But Aquileia waned before Grado, which lies on the sands of its lagoon, and was once a busy, thriving port, almost a "second Venice." Under Austrian rule this little pearl of a town among the waters has become a bathing-place, a seaside resort, for families from Vienna and Trieste and Budapest taking their salt-water *kur*. Austria had no objection to that: Grado could be content to exhibit its winding streets and picturesque

piazzas to the holiday-makers ; but it was too Italian to be encouraged as a harbour or trade entrepôt.

The Venetians, in their more vigorous day, had maintained navigable channels through these Friulian lagoons, connecting Grado with the mother city, and so bringing the products of all this country into Italy. Under the Austrian *régime* the communications and the traffic of the country between the Tagliamento and the Isonzo, even on the Italian side, went eastward to Trieste. But that will not last much longer. No sooner did the Italians get possession of Grado in the summer of 1915 than they set to work to restore the old canalisation of the lagoons and the river mouth, to link up Grado, Aquileia, and the Tagliamento with Venice. Even in the first stress of the war the enterprise was pushed on with ardour. By the autumn it was finished, and barges of 600 tons burden were floating through the Marano lagoon and passing up the Tagliamento, carrying stores and munitions to the dépôts for the Army of the Isonzo.

Primarily these great engineering works, like the roads, railways, bridges, the Italians are building all over the frontier territories, serve military purposes ; ultimately they will be potent agents of that commercial and industrial expansion which is to follow the war. “ *Quel grand pays cette*

Italie," exclaims M. Maurice Barrès, "qui construisait Aquileia quand les Germains ne savaient que faire des ruines, et qui se remet aujourd'hui au premier rang des peuples, par le talent de ses terrassiers et ses ingénieurs!" One of M. Barrès' Italian friends said to him, "Our armies, like the legions of Rome, leave in their track not ruins (that will do for the *Tedeschi*), but the works of civilisation." Those who see what the Italians have done, during the war, in the Carnia and the Trentino, as well as in the basin of the Tagliamento and the Isonzo, will feel that there was some warrant for this proud claim.

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On your way into the Italian war-zone you turn out of the main west-and-east railway at Mestre, which all the world knows because it is the jumping-off place for Venice, the station at the beginning of the long causeway that links the island-city to the mainland. But the Veneto northward is less known to the traveller from abroad than it should be. For it is studded over with charming little towns, Treviso, Pordenone, Conegliano, Cividale, Udine, bearing the ineffaceable stamp which the Republic sealed upon its colonies and dependencies all the way round from the Montenegrin mountains to the Alps. Here, in their villas among

the jasmynes and roses, the nobles and merchant princes of Venice escaped from the sea mists of the lagoon. Here, too, are names that recall other and later memories. We pass Campo Formio, and think of the young Bonaparte scattering the Austrians in defeat before his impetuous legions, and then bartering away to his vanquished adversary the liberties of Venice, impotent and decayed. Here, in this greatest of all wars, we are always on the traces of the battles, the little battles—how small they seem now!—of the past. What skirmishes they are: Rivoli, Arcole, yes, even Austerlitz and Waterloo, compared with Tannenberg and Verdun, the Marne and the Somme!

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Udine is as charming as any of these Friulian towns, and as unknown, or at least it was as unknown, to the alien tourist before the beginning of the war, though since then<sup>1</sup> it has had important visitors. Prime Ministers, Commanders-in-Chief, Ambassadors, Parliamentary delegates, foreign generals, famous authors, journalists of many tongues, have found their way to it. They were not exactly engaged in searching for the picturesque; yet

<sup>1</sup> "For reasons," says M. Gabriel Faure, with a discretion it is proper to imitate, "which cannot be mentioned, though all the world knows them."—G. Faure, *Sur l'autre côté des Alpes*, p. 111.



A COVERED ALTAR IN ST. MARK'S, VENICE





even in the midst of their preoccupation they must have noticed that Udine is a delightful place, and perhaps have resolved, as I did, to come back to it when one can do so with an easier mind. I found myself constantly tempted to saunter through its arcaded streets, forgetful of that great business of the hour which one forgets so seldom ; or lingering about the little piazza, as exquisite as any you will find in all Italy, with its loggias and its statues. There is a fountain, and two huge and very naked giants in stone, an Austrian emperor pompously imperial on horseback, a marble slab in honour of certain Friulian martyrs whose blood Austria had shed, and a monument to Peace that must have seemed as ironically out of place, when Napoleon had it set up to commemorate the Treaty of Campo Formio in which he signed away the independence of Venice, as it does to-day.

For Udine does not long allow you to lose sight of the fact that it is one of the hubs of the world-war. Soldiers are everywhere, strolling in groups and couples along the narrow pavements of the curving streets, and lounging in the piazza. Officers of every grade and arm of the service pass by, saluting and saluted. The Italian soldier salutes by passing his hand to his forehead and holding it there horizontally with the palm downwards, shading his eyes with it, as it were, a respectful mode of greeting which is more graceful than our

own jerky back-hand swing, or the staccato movement of the French. He has plenty of scope for this exercise in Udine. Grey-headed staff officers, smart cavalrymen, officers of the Alpini in their mountaineering hats, black-plumed bersaglieri, stout colonels, and slim *sottotenenti* (sub-lieutenants) claim his attention.

He must keep his eyes open in order to pay the proper compliments to foreign officers also. Here is a French colonel, very decorative, amid the sober Italian grey, in his pretty light blue uniform and gold-braided kepi; here a tall, much medalled Russian; here a British general brass-hatted, belted, and red-tabbed; or a group of British subalterns, in their neat khaki, fresh-cheeked, smart, cheerful. The French are grave, the Italians composed and sober, the Germans, I suppose, grim and sour. But Britain began the war with a smile, and smiling, I think, she will go through with it.

The war comes home to you in more pungent forms. Up above the gem of a piazza there is a great mound. They say Attila had it made as a sort of observation post wherefrom he might conveniently watch the siege and burning of Aquileia. It is serving a similar purpose now. On the top of the hill there is a palace, once the residence of Venetian and Austrian governors, and a castello with a tall tower, and a broad terrace walk, from which you can see, far away across the plain, the

Isonzo and the whole curve of the mountains from over Monfalcone up past Gorizia and away to the Carnia. You can walk up to this platform from the bustling, sunny streets, and have the war before you : hear the guns booming from Italian and Austrian batteries, see the white puffs where the shells are bursting on the hillside, and note the captive balloons lying in motionless blobs of brown against the clear sky, on the look-out for hostile aeroplanes.

The flyers of the enemy are much interested in Udine, and the syren is constantly in action warning the inhabitants to get under cover, of which there is no lack in this town of arcades and stone-built verandahs. The fine old palazzo in which I lodged (Udine is full of palaces, the ancient residences of the Friulian aristocracy) fronted on an open square which was a favourite dumping ground for Austrian bombs. Two days before my arrival a projectile had fallen just outside the house, breaking all the windows and leaving its traces in the shape of several large holes blown out of the inner wall of the room where I slept. My host, coming down the stairs to investigate, opened the front door and found the dead body of a young girl lying across the threshold. But the assailants had never yet reached their real military objective, nor had they succeeded, in spite of their occasional murders, in convincing the civilian population that an air-

fight was anything but a highly entertaining show. From which it will be seen that the Austrian raiders are no more scrupulous in their methods, nor are they more successful in the results, than their friends of the German Zeppelin squadrons when they assail the British Isles.







## CHAPTER III

### GEOGRAPHY AND STRATEGY

ITALY'S PRIME DIFFICULTIES—THE ALPINE STAIRWAYS—AUSTRIA ALWAYS LOOKING DOWN—THE PROJECTED INVASION—CADORNA'S VIGOROUS COUNTER-ACTION—THE RUSH FOR THE TARENTINO—TRIESTE THE MAIN ITALIAN OBJECTIVE—THE AUSTRIAN RETREAT—THE BRILLIANT STROKE AT GORIZIA

**F**ROM Udine or from Vicenza, with a good motor-car, an abundant supply of petrol, and competent guidance, you can set out to examine the Italian front. The process will give you some new ideas and add much to your enlightenment. To understand the campaign you must go and look at it. When you have done that, when you have come to close quarters with this unique warfare on the rugged fringes of the great mountain mass which is the backbone and projecting dorsal fin of Central Europe, you will lose all disposition, if you have had any, to depreciate Italy's share in the world conflict, or to make invidious comparisons between her effort and that of her allies.

Any tendency of this kind will be checked by such an investigation of the geographical conditions as can only be usefully attempted in the theatre of operations itself, with such opportunities as General Cadorna and his staff courteously placed at my disposal. The bulletins of the Italian War Office, which from the beginning have been notably precise, lucid, and trustworthy, may do much to help the student, if he will take the trouble, which of course not one person in ten thousand ever does, to work out the orographical details on a large-scale contour map. But the official communiqués deal, as they must, with the minutiae of the tactical situation, as it changes, at one point or another, from day to day; and the reader at a distance finds it difficult to seize the full meaning of these movements and manœuvres in a country so torn and twisted, so channelled by river valleys and sinuous passes, so crumpled into layer upon layer of folded hills, so overlooked and dominated by that colossal background of the alpine ranges which thrust their vast black shoulders, and their heads of splintered rock and gleaming snow, over all the lesser heights before them.

There is no prospect on earth quite like the immense irregular crescent of serrated peak, and towering mountain wall, that is thrown round Italy on the north, as it unrolls itself from the plains of Lombardy and Venetia. How often one



has gazed at it in sheer delight over its bewildering wealth of contrasting colour and fantastic form its effects of light and shade, and measureless space ! But now, for these many months past, keen eyes have been bent upon it, eyes not of the artist or the poet but those of the soldier. It was such a pair of military eyes that I had beside me when I stood upon the topmost roof of a high tower in a certain little town in Northern Italy, where much history has been made ; and since the owner of the eyes was likewise the possessor of a very well-ordered mind and a gift of lucid exposition, I found myself able to grasp the main elements of the extraordinarily complex strategical problem with which the chiefs of the Italian army have had to grapple. As I looked and listened I felt that the chapter which Italy is contributing to the record of the greatest war of all time is one of which she will have every reason to be proud when she has at length brought it to a victorious conclusion.

There are few such view-points as this ; for in the luminous stillness of a perfect morning of Italian summer I could look north, and east, and west, upon more than a third of the embattled line that goes snaking among the mountains, from the huge massif of the Ortler on the Swiss frontier to the Gulf of Trieste. And what a length of line it is ! In England some people seem to think it is a little war that Italy has on hand,



little in comparison with the main campaigns in France and Russia. But it is not small weighed even in that exacting balance. Trace out the Front on the map—and here again you must have a large-scale map to follow all the intricate convolutions—and you will find that it measures out at over four hundred and fifty miles, and so may bear some comparison with that ribbon of trench and ruined villages and tortured earth which is drawn across Western Europe.

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But here the geographical situation is very different from that in Flanders and France. "The frontier," said the Italian officer to me, "is worth three victorious campaigns to Austria." I could easily believe it at the moment, for from where we stood, high up above the plain of the Veneto, a wide stretch of this same frontier was visible. At our feet and all about us the level country lay glistening in the sunshine, with the white towers and red roofs of the towns rising like islands out of that sea of green and gold. And if your gaze travelled across the plain, north, or east, or west, it was arrested by the mountain masses, billowing skyward in range beyond range, banks of grey and purple in the foreground, great black hulks and ridges further back, with gleams of silver flashing from snow-peaks among the clouds of the horizon.

On that bastion, everywhere on its higher ramparts, Austria has sat in her armour, guarded and secure herself, always ready to surge down through the gates and passes and river valleys upon the hill country and lower slopes of Italy, and then into the rich cities and fertile fields of Lombardy and Venetia. The barrier for part of its length, in the great salient of the Trentino, and on the steep and stony cliffs along the Isonzo, has Italian soil and Italian peoples behind it, the unredeemed Italy that gives the motive for this war. But to reach the promised land Italy has to fight her way up the mountains, and throw out the alien garrison encamped upon their upper levels.

The task which she is now accomplishing would have been spared her if Prussia had kept faith in 1866, when Austria lay at the mercy of her northern and southern neighbours. But the Hohenzollern monarchy, as usual, sacrificed its allies. After Sadowa, when the Treaty of Prague was being arranged, Italy asked for the Trentino. Her requests were ignored. The Prussian Government coldly replied that no Tyrolese territory could be alienated from Austria since it belonged to the Germanic Confederation. Let us at least have Trieste, implored the Italians. Bismarck angrily refused. "Trieste for Germany," he had twice exclaimed at the Diet of Frankfort in resonant tones. Austria could keep the great Italian port

in pledge for Prussia, till Prussia was ready to plant her own mailed foot upon the sands of the Mediterranean.

Thus it has come about that Italy has had to fight on a front which that able Italian critic, Luigi Barzini, calls the most arduous in the whole European war. French and English military experts, he says, familiar with the conditions in France, in Russia, even in the Dardanelles, Swiss writers who know what mountain warfare means, the attachés of the allied armies, have been amazed by the unexampled difficulties which the Italian armies have faced.<sup>1</sup>

The feature of the campaign when it opened was that the Italians were always going up while the Austrians only needed to come down. The former were below, and the latter high above on that immense natural rampart of the Rhaetian and Tyrolese Alps, the Dolomites, the Carnia, the Julian and Dinaric ranges, which places Italy at the mercy of the invader so long as it is in the hands of an armed and alien Power. From my watch-tower I could see the plain lying before me, pegged down to the earth, as it were, like a green carpet. On that dead flat it stretches to the edge of the mountain barrier, where the hills leap from it like cliffs rising out of a motionless sea.

Some of the hills are within the Italian frontier.

<sup>1</sup> Luigi Barzini : *Al Fronte* (1915).



Photo: "Central News,")

A HARD PULL UPWARDS





But these are the lesser heights ; and always behind, and commanding them, are the loftier uplands, which were in enemy territory. The double loop of the S-shaped Austro-Italian frontier is as bad as it can be for the southern country and gives all the advantages to the northern.

The S starts in the Bernina at the sources of the Adda, from which there is a steady descent down that river to the Lake of Como and the network of roads and railways running across the rich flat land to Milan. Then, after cutting across the Stelvio and Tonale passes, dominated by the snow-clad masses of the Ortler and Adamello, the loop swings southward round the Trentino, leaving in Austrian hands the mountains that look down on the roads leading to Brescia and Verona, and towering above the lesser elevations of the Sette Comuni and the Asiago plateau. At the Val Sugana it turns north again, curving through the jagged gulleys and rock castles of the Dolomites, and leaving Austria to sweep from the Carnia through the only tolerable inlets into the Veneto. And in its final southward stretch, from Cividale to the Marano lagoons, it leaves Istria and the Triestine blocked off by Monte Nero and the grim stone bank of the Carso, from which the Austrians had an unobstructed view, right away to the horizon, over the levels of the vast alluvial plain of north-eastern Italy between the Apennines and the Alps.

Sedulously had the Austrians, in the years before the war, laboured to increase the natural strength of the frontier which luck, the accidents of history, and the age-long political weakness of Italy, had given them. Their roads were laid out strategically behind the border line, so that they could move transport and troops and military stores to the key points and the valley heads. Every state has a right to make defensive works along its own frontier; but the fortresses and fortified posts which pointed their guns over the Trentino and the Isonzo country went far beyond any reasonable exigencies of defence, and were clearly intended to muzzle and menace Italy.

They were the less necessary for protective purposes, since Italy had not ventured to stiffen her own side of the mountain curtain in any similar fashion. Had she begun to make military roads or to erect elaborate fortifications she would have risked a quarrel, for which she was unprepared, with her watchful and arrogant neighbour. The Triple Alliance would not have guaranteed her against that "preventive war" which, even as it was, General Konrad von Hoetzendorf had been in favour of initiating, in order to teach Italy her place, and keep her for all time from interfering with the Balkanic policy of the "forward" party in Vienna and Budapest. And thus it fell that when at last war came, it found the Italians so situated

that they have had to make their advance, and build their trenches, and place their guns, in the face of an enemy who lay generally much above them, sometimes so much above them that he could watch them from his nests of earth and rock as though he were soaring in an aeroplane.

It is a great achievement in strategy and military engineering that the Italians are attempting, and what it has involved is seen when one examines it in its details. But it is also something besides this. It is the reversal of an historic process that has gone on at intervals for over fifteen centuries. Down that mountain stairway, to the fertile fields and wealthy cities of the plain, have the invaders of Italy tramped. Hun and Goth and Lombard, Frank, German, Austrian, flung themselves from the heights upon that low-lying delectable land of sunshine and verdure.

As it was before so it might have been again. It was commonly expected outside Italy, and I believe by many people in Italy itself, that the story of the former campaigns would have been repeated. The Austrian armies, with all their advantages of position accentuated by their superiority in heavy artillery, would have forced their way down the valleys, and the Italians would have been compelled to retire behind the Lombard fortresses ; and then, since fortresses are no more than temporary barriers in modern warfare, they might have

had to contemplate a further withdrawal beyond the Po.

The retirement might have been avenged, as the full strength of Italy developed, by a victorious advance in which the enemy would have been gradually cleared out of the plains and chased back through the mountains. But even though the invasion of Italy had ended in failure, it would in itself have been a misfortune of the gravest kind. Italy would have seen her most productive industrial districts raided and occupied. The seizure of those rich and famous northern towns, and of that busy agricultural region, would have been a misfortune comparable to those which have delivered the wealthiest manufacturing provinces of France and Russia to German occupation. Italy would have carried on the campaign under financial and economic difficulties that cannot well be exaggerated.

The Italian General Staff must have considered this disastrous contingency, and were no doubt ready to meet it if it arose. But they determined to counter it by striking first. Instead of waiting for the enemy to come down the passages from the Trentino, they rushed the stairway themselves. Their magnificent Alpine troops and mountain artillery brought up their guns by incredible exertions to the gates of the Austrian frontier fortresses, battered some of these into shards, and

pushed their way to within a few miles of the capital of Italia Irredenta. There they hung grimly all through the winter and the spring.

General Cadorna had rightly read the lesson of this war, the lesson of all wars : which is that a passive defence is not the road to victory. And so, with forces not yet completely embodied, and with a conspicuous inferiority of artillery and munitions, he boldly forced the game, and placed his scaling ladders against the bastions of the enemy.

The people of Italy were spared the tribulations of France, Belgium, Serbia, Poland, the bitter thought that vast numbers of their countrymen were living in their own provinces under the heel of a ruthless foe. There is no Austrian military governor of Brescia or Vicenza engaged in imitating the brutalities of the German rulers of Belgium.

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The Austrian strategic programme, worked out during the years in which Italy was supposed to be lulled into security by the Triple Alliance and dosed to somnolence by the German banks, contemplated a brusque and rapid offensive. Once again, as so often before, the Northern troops would pour down from their fortresses, drive the army of "mandoline-players" before them, and speedily inflict upon the Italians, whose military capacity



was regarded by their former oppressors with the utmost contempt, "punishment" like that reserved for the presumptuous Serbs.

The plan might have had more prospect of success if Austria could have thrown her whole strength upon the southern front during those months in which Italy was still striving hard to complete her preparations. But the Dual Monarchy had its right arm held in Galicia, and the Italians were strong enough to keep the war for twelve months on the frontier. By the magnificent work of his Alpini and other mountain troops Cadorna blocked the passes of the Ortler, the Adamello, and the Cadore. In the Trentino the Austrians were compelled to give ground, the Italians crossed the border, and got almost within sight of Trent, the City of Desire. The Italian Chief of the Staff had no intention of confining himself to the defensive. He opened the campaign with a vigorous attack on the only portion of Austrian territory which had no strong natural protection, and quickly overran the wedge of country west of the Isonzo. Monfalcone, Cervignano, Cormons, Gradisca—old Italian towns all—were occupied.

Cadorna's main objective was Trieste, and from that he never allowed himself to be diverted. The city is protected by the formidable rocky ridges of the Carso and San Michele, with the fortress of Gorizia, the Austrian Verdun, guarding the bridge-



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.*

THE GRAFENBERG AFTER THE ATTACK OF AUG. 8TH, 1916



head and the depression through which the railway runs to Trieste. At these the Italian generals were sapping and hammering incessantly from the early summer of 1915 onwards. The task was much more arduous, and the Italian sacrifices far heavier, than English people in general understood until the brilliant *coup de main* on Gorizia attracted the attention of the world to the Carso operations.

The Italians would have made more rapid progress in this quarter but for their deplorable inferiority, at the outset, in artillery. They were badly in want of heavy guns to grind the enemy's strongholds to powder. What they did in July 1916 they might have accomplished several months earlier if they had not been overmatched by the hostile batteries, as the British and French were in the first period of the campaign on the Meuse and Yser. Guns of large calibre cannot be built in a week. By strenuous exertions the Italians, helped by no such industrial resources as we possess, have gone far to make up their deficiencies. They compensated for their shortage of the heaviest cannon by a rapid output of guns of medium calibre, and by making numerous howitzers and big mortars, pieces of short range which hurl a deadly missile into an opposing trench. While these weapons were being prepared the infantry clung on tenaciously, holding the ground till the time came to

smother the hostile defences under tempests of concentrated fire.

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The Austrian offensive in the Trentino in May 1916 was designed to draw away the pressure from the Isonzo and divert the Italians from their main objective ; with the subsidiary hope also of dealing them such a blow at a vital point that their whole scheme of defence would have been shattered. But General von Konrad's enterprise involved so many risks, and most of all the risk of weakening the eastern flank in face of the Russian advance, that it was probably dictated as much by political and moral as by purely military reasons. Race hatred, an angry scorn for the Italians as a fighting people, and a desire to revive the prestige of the Monarchy by carrying the war into the enemy's country, were contributory factors.

The conception, if faulty, was bold, and it was put into execution with energy. In the spring vast depôts of stores, equipment, and munitions were established, and an elaborate system of transport and water supply organised. Units were collected from the Russian front, the Balkans, and the Landsturm contingents, and by the middle of May the Austrians had massed upon the Trentino eighteen full divisions with supplementary battalions, roughly, 400,000 men, with no fewer than 2000



guns, including twenty batteries of the huge 12-inch cannon, and eight of the 15-inch and 16.5 monsters—giants which had no rivals on the Italian side.

“Moral” agencies were busily employed. The Trentino inroad was described as a *Strafe* expedition, designed to chastise the Italians for their “treason.” The soldiers were told that the Italian troops were cowardly and disheartened, that victory over them would be easy, and that then the towns and villages of Lombardy and Venetia, with their wealth, and wine, and women, would be delivered over to the lust and greed of the conquerors.

In the middle of May the powerful concentration of guns and men rolled down between the Adige and the Brenta. The Italians, smitten by a tremendous bombardment and exposed to sudden infantry onslaughts at many points, bent back before the blast. They executed what the official review calls a “calm and well-ordered retirement,” which eventually left the Austrians in possession of the greater part of the elevated plateau of the Sette Comuni, and the upper portion of the Brenta valley. With the enemy hanging over the very edge of the plains, and steadily moving his great guns forward from the higher positions, the situation for the Italians in the beginning of June seemed at one time critical, and it looked as if the

invaders might after all make good their dash upon the main railway and line of communications, and seize Vicenza and perhaps Verona.

But the Army of the Trentino, hampered though it was by insufficient ammunition, held on grimly, and its infantry never yielded a yard of ground without a desperate struggle. Von Konrad had banked all his stakes upon a swift irresistible advance, that would paralyse the Italian defence in time to allow guns and troops to be sent back in a few weeks to the Eastern front. But after the first downward swoop the Austrian progress slackened; and by the middle of June it had definitely come to a standstill in the Adige valley. In the Astico and Val Sugana sectors the forward movement of the invaders was continued a little longer; and a considerable zone, mostly of wooded, rugged, and mountainous country, with a few small towns like Arsiero and Asiago, was abandoned to them.

But here, also, the road was blocked. To obtain this limited success the Austrians had used up an enormous quantity of material and munitions, and had lost in killed and wounded at least a hundred thousand men. They had fatally weakened themselves on one of their fronts, and had failed to deliver a decisive blow upon the other. Such success as they had attained was largely the result of an audacious, but, as it turned out, a futile attempt

at bluff. The Comando Supremo did not believe that the Austrian General Staff would leave themselves at the mercy of the Russians by sending a horde of troops and the cream of their artillery to cut the Italian communication in the Upper Veneto. The very irrationality of the project prevented adequate preparations being made to meet it. When the move did come it obtained the temporary advantage that nearly always attends a surprise attack.

Cadorna had the situation well in hand throughout. Even while the Austrians were still slowly and expensively bearing back the Italian centre he was pushing his troops up on their flanks. For this purpose strong reinforcements were required, and a new army was collected from the garrisons, the reserve companies, and other portions of the line, organised, equipped, and moved to the field of action with unprecedented rapidity. There has been no more remarkable triumph of administrative energy in any of the theatres of the war. In the working days of a single week this army of half a million men had been swept together from many distant and scattered stations, formed into brigades and divisions, provided with its staff, train, medical units, and artillery, and transported into the mountain country, in many cases by roads which had to be constructed for this special purpose.

The colossal task was carried out with astonishingly little disturbance of the normal conditions of

life. Outside the war-zone Italy was hardly conscious of the amazing effort she was making. One has heard hard words said of the Italian railways by impatient tourists ; but on this occasion they rose brilliantly to the emergency. Regiments, batteries, army corps, tons of ammunition, supplies, wagons, horses, machinery, the immense and cumbrous impedimenta of modern warfare, were trucked from all parts of the Peninsula and rolled in endless trains along the main line to the strategic centres. It is scarcely credible that with all this gigantic movement of troops the public service of the railways should have been suspended for no more than three days. After that it was resumed, and a week later it was working as smoothly as ever, and there was little to tell the traveller that anything unusual was happening.

\* \* \*

By the opening of the last week in June the Austrian General Staff recognised that its bold stroke for the subjugation of Italy had failed. Their invading force, held fast in front, and now counter-attacked on both flanks, could make no further progress ; and events in Galicia clamoured for the release of the regiments and batteries tied up beyond the Alps. It was decided that half at least of the eighteen Trentino divisions and most of the





*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

ADVANCED POST IN VAL LAGARINA





heavy guns should be drawn back and railed to the Carpathians. Cadorna knew of this intention, or shrewdly guessed at it, and determined that it should not be carried into effect without at least considerable delay and difficulty. On June 26 flags were fluttering, and faces were gay with smiles, in the towns of Northern Italy, for it was known that the invading army was in retreat with the national troops hard upon their traces.

Then followed another week of rapid movement, fierce fighting, and skilful manœuvres. The Chief of the Italian Staff performed an invaluable service to the Allied cause, not so much by compelling the Austrians to retire, for that they had resolved to do in any case, as by rendering it impossible for them to retire in the manner they had proposed. Their programme was to retreat to their prepared positions on the high ground from Vallarsa, across the Altipiano, to the Dolomites, and to establish themselves on this commanding line, with much reduced numbers, while at least nine full divisions were being brought away for the East. But the pursuit was so eager that the Austrians could not disengage, and could only fall back slowly, in touch all the time with their relentless antagonists. If any unit gained a kilometre of ground it was swiftly followed up and forced to stand and fight a hard rear-guard action with infantry and guns. The Italian troops were flung

after them in motor-cars along the mountain roads, or streamed on foot over the hills, unresting and impetuous ; even cavalry were pushed through the woodland paths to worry and delay the retreating columns until the infantry could get their teeth into them.

It was another signal triumph of organisation and skilful staff work ; for the pursuit moved through an empty and thirsty land, and food and water for the men, ammunition for the cannon, had to be brought up on wheels and mule-back from the plains. But the object was attained. The great transfer of enemy troops could not be effected ; and while these sorely needed divisions were chained to the Trentino, the Russians were pressing on to the Dniester. The Austrian retreat was still menaced. The Italian guns commanded the two railway lines via the Brenner and the Pusterthal, which meet at Franzensfeste, and it was doubtful whether the enemy would be able to use them freely for the further withdrawal of troops and cannon. Certain it is that the Italian operations in the Trentino contributed directly, and in no slight degree, to the Russian successes on Austria's receding Eastern front.

But Cadorna, as I have said, never lost sight of his main objective, which was the road to Trieste. All through July, while the enemy was kept busy with attacks on their remaining positions in the

central region and bombardments of their Dolomite fortresses, preparations were being made for the assault on Gorizia and the Carso. There was another of those swift movements of troops in masses in which the Italian General Staff excels, and a highly successful attempt to mislead the enemy as to the purpose in view. The wonderful engineering and road-making contingents were set to work, and tunnels were driven under the very feet of the Austrians on the Carso, so that when the attack was delivered Italian infantry detachments emerged from the earth within a few yards of the trenches.

The Austrians were completely deceived by the ostentatious demonstrations of activity in other quarters, and apparently knew nothing of the great assemblage of guns, howitzers, and heavy trench mortars which, on August 5 and 6, rained a torrent of fire upon their defensive works, and rendered them untenable. The garrison of Gorizia, stunned and deafened by this *feu d'enfer*, directed now on one point, now on another, was in no condition to resist the impetuous onslaught of the Duke of Aosta's soldiers rushing in with bayonet and grenade. Hardly anywhere in the whole European war have fortified positions been carried with such *élan* and such rapidity. The evacuation of Gorizia, which its former owners believed impregnable, and the rich haul of prisoners

and guns, were the best testimony to the demoralisation of the defenders, and the vigour and spirit of the attack.

It was a notable victory, achieved not only by the gallantry and fighting quality of the troops engaged, but by consummate generalship. The Austrians were under the illusion that the effort made to arrest and throw back the invasion from the Trentino had exhausted the Italian power of taking the offensive for a long period. Some foreign critics agreed with them. Military writers of authority in the summer of 1915 warned the world not to expect an effective stroke from the side of Italy for many months to come. These predictions were falsified by the skilful use of inner lines, which enabled the Italian Command to maintain the pressure in the Trentino while the concentration of troops and war material was proceeding on the Isonzo. Battles, even in this day of trenches and long-range artillery, are not won by sitting down and standing still.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE WAR-ZONE AND THE TRENCHES

THE GUARDED ARENA—A NATURAL DIVISION IN ITALY—THE NEW ROADS—BATTERIES IN THE AIR—SOUTHERNERS IN THE SNOW—THE ADAPTATIONS OF TRENCH WARFARE

YOU have not been many days or even hours in the Italian theatre of war before you discover that it is in many respects different from those of Western Europe.

It has indeed one point in common with these and I suppose with all the others. It is a theatre to which nobody is admitted without a ticket. This is among the strangest characteristics of the new warfare. In the old days, right down to 1870 and later, the armies wandered about among the civilian population, and it could not have been very difficult for the non-combatant to go and see a battle if he cared to take the risks. In these times matters are more strictly regulated.

Fifteen millions of men are engaged in mortal conflict within a number of gigantic prize-rings, carefully railed off and fenced in, and most rigidly

guarded from unauthorised intrusion. There is positively no admission except on business. The huge multitude of performers, and the very minute handful of spectators, cannot pass the barriers unless they have an official permit, elaborately signed, countersigned, stamped, and *visé*.

Even those who had their abodes within the war-zone, before the armies came, cannot enter or leave it or move from their homes, without a licence and safe-conduct. To neglect these rules is futile, to defy them extremely dangerous. Those who, from curiosity or other motives, climb into the arena without showing their passes at the gates will be lucky if nothing worse happens to them than prompt and unceremonious expulsion. Something much worse may happen ; and in the early stages of the campaign in France, before the new system was quite understood, and when espionage was rampant, it not unfrequently did.

It follows from this that a line is drawn round the sphere of operations which marks it off decisively from the adjacent territory. But generally the boundary is purely artificial. This is painfully noticeable in France where the war has been waged on the native soil, so that a large French population has been exposed throughout to the rigours of military rule or the greater hardships of hostile occupation. Those long tiers of

trenches—a combination, as someone has called them, of slaughter-house and cesspool—have been drawn through some of the most fertile and thriving districts of the country. The tragedy has been enacted not merely at the doors of France but within the corridors and living-rooms of her house. And of Belgium, and Serbia, and Poland one need not speak.

In Italy it has been otherwise, partly through wise and bold strategy at the outset, partly from the geographical conditions. Nature, which threw the sea round three sides of the Peninsula, piled up the great belt of mountains and upland where it joins the Continent on the north. It is in this isolated region of rock, and wood, and lofty pasture, and secluded valley, thinly inhabited by herdsmen and hunters, that the military operations have taken place.

In Italy the war-zone is a natural, rather than a merely strategical and political, division; and except on part of the Isonzo front, where it fades into the lowlands, it is a sort of no-man's-land, picturesque and beautiful, but well marked off from the thriving, populous, fertile country below it, which has been curiously and mercifully untouched by the ravages and perturbations of war. There have been occasional air-raids, less destructive than those we have endured in Britain, on the Lombard towns and the coasts. But otherwise

the war-zone lies outside the populated world of Italy, and belongs to that other world of vast solitary spaces and sparsely peopled slopes.

This feature of the campaign is brought well before your consciousness as you make your way to the scene of operations through the sun-smitten roads and smiling little towns of Northern Italy. When you think of France, with the fangs of the invaders buried deep in her quivering side, of Britain with all its busy restlessness, this is like a land of peace. The war is close at hand ; and yet it seems far away from this cheerful countryside, that might have been delivered over to rapine and outrage, like so many other fair regions of Europe. Life runs quietly and pleasantly ; there is no sign of scarcity or want or indeed of any unusual agitation.

As we sped along the lovely lower valley of the Brenta, and stopped at a village albergo for an excellent breakfast, it was hard to believe that one was not just the ordinary tourist in search of the picturesque. Here and there one passed a base hospital ; now and again a few soldiers were on the move ; occasionally a military motor-car went by. There are no private cars on the roads, for the Government has commandeered them all, and does not allow petrol to be wasted over joy-rides. The peasants were at work in their fields, mostly old people and women of course, though it struck me that there were more young men about





*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

BARBED WIRE ON THE MOUNTAINS





than one sees just now in either France or England. Italy has a large army embodied. But she has not exhausted her reserves and has plenty more men to call up when she is ready for them.

We turned from the wide low valley and swept up a road into the hills ; and then quite suddenly the atmosphere changed, and we knew that we had plunged into the real war area. Here we come upon the now familiar signs which indicate that one is behind the lines of a great army deployed on a fighting front. We paused at a little town to get our passes checked at the divisional Staff Office. In other times it is a haunt of artists. Now its winding narrow streets and small piazza were so choked with soldiers that we could hardly make our way through them. Many thousands are camped or billeted here, for this is near the base of a long, long slope which rises to where the trenches are, and the batteries, far up the heights. Motor-lorries, packed with food or ammunition, rumble past on their way aloft. They have broad wheels with transverse flanges on their flat iron tyres, and with this aid they can plough along upwards at what seems an impossible angle of ascent. In this war of the mountains the very waggons become mountaineers.

But the most adventurous of wheeled vehicles want a road of some sort if it can be got. Here, when the campaign began, there was nothing but a

hill-path up which the villagers could climb with stick and bundle. To-day that path has been changed into a fine road, graded, metalled, and carried by cunningly devised spirals and turns three-quarters of the way up the mountain. Eventually it will go on into the next valley, and then over the shoulder of the opposite hill, where the Austrians now have their first-line trenches, and then again up and on into Italia Irredenta beyond.

It is a notable piece of military engineering, but it is not merely that. It will serve as an artery of commerce when it is no longer needed for the passage of guns and army-service waggons. There is nothing temporary or makeshift about it. Rocks have been blasted to make a passage, and solid bridges of stone and steel thrown across the mountain torrents. There are many such roads behind the Italian front, and they will remain as a permanent memorial of the campaign and the spirit in which it is undertaken. The Italians are an economical people, with the Latin turn for accurate measurement and careful calculations. If they are spending a vast amount of money on this war they mean to get a good deal in return. And they understand that the work of the soldier and the road-maker goes hand in hand.

This road has made it much easier to supply the batteries which lie behind, or among, the first and second line trenches, and the trenches themselves.

By its means stores can be pushed high up and accumulated at convenient spots whence they can be distributed by mule carts or hand trucks. Along it the medium and heavy calibre guns are hauled comfortably by traction engines, and placed in position with that concealment which is almost the prime requisite of modern artillery science.

There are batteries far away from any road, and which no road could reach. Because the Austrians started with the weather-gage in their favour, being for the most on the upper side of the great ridges, it was necessary for the Italians to get their guns as high as they could. The means by which they accomplished these tasks were described to me. They would seem incredible if one had not ocular demonstration of the actual presence of the cannon among these inaccessible crags. There are some of them on the ice-ledges of the Ortler nearly ten thousand feet above sea level, in places which it is by way of an achievement for the amateur climber to reach with guides and ropes and porters and nothing to take care of but his own skin. And here the Alpini and Frontier Guides had to bring up the heavy pieces, hauling them over the snow slopes, and swinging them in mid-air across chasms and up knife-edged precipices by ropes passed over timbers wedged somehow into the rocks.

Some of the pioneers lived through the winter very much in the manner of Polar explorers. In

snow huts and dug-outs they found shelter, not merely from the searching Austrian guns but from the icy winds and pitiless storms. They are in no danger of perishing from lack of food and fuel. They have good kerosene stoves to keep them warm ; and their oil and meat and bread and wine are sent up to them by the teleferic railway, the wire rope with its sliding baskets stretched across the chasms and the tree tops. Wounded men are sometimes sent down by that sagging rope, when there is no other means of getting them away quickly, clinging as best they can to the swaying boxes.

They are not all mountaineers, or men used to mountain climates, who face these ordeals. Many of the artillerymen and the gallant bersaglieri are from the South, that warm sub-tropical South of Italy, where the perfumed winds breathe softly over myrtles and oleanders under radiant skies. These men, Sicilians and Neapolitans, many of whom had scarcely seen snow or ice, how would they endure this life of wind and cold and drenching mist and cutting rain ? I am told that the question was asked with some anxiety at the beginning. It has turned out that the Southerners have done as well as the soldiers of the North, and suffered no more. They have come quite cheerfully and in good health through it all. Perhaps it is the stored caloric of ancestral sun in their bodies



that keeps them warm ; perhaps the flame that has been kindled in their souls by the thought of Italy's great adventure.

The worst of dangers in some of these alpine stations, worse even than the Austrian cannon, the great 305's and 420's which drop their crashing projectiles from the clouds, was the avalanche. The snow masses, loosened by the concussion of the bombardments, are more treacherous and insecure than ever. Those indications of coming movement, for which the mountaineer is always on the watch, are no longer perceptible ; and at a moment when all seems calm the *valanga* will thunder down and sweep men and guns away or bury them fathoms deep. " We lost forty men and two guns up there the other day," said the artillery colonel to me, pointing to an innocent-looking slope above us. We were standing beside one of his own guns hidden snugly in a wooded hollow, so covered up with leafage that no prying aeroplane could find it out. But sometimes, in this war at high altitudes, risks must be taken, and the pieces exposed to the perils prepared by nature or the enemy. So it was on this occasion. The guns were got out from under the snow, little damaged. They were to be moved up again next week. And the men ? " We shall send other men," said the Colonel quietly.

There are trenches and trenches. When the World Museum, which will be a record of the World War, is established, it will doubtless contain models and specimens of every kind. An amazed posterity—then perhaps conducting its military operations exclusively in the air—will note the many different fashions in which men fought on the ground and under the ground, in this second decade of the twentieth century. There will be a rich variety in the exhibition of mole-work and worm-work. Ditch and tunnel and mine in all their forms will be presented, from the shallow groove scooped with the soldier's entrenching tool on the field, to the elaborate fortified moat, with its concrete walls, and revolving steel turrets, and emplacements for howitzers and heavy mortars: not to mention its bath-rooms laid on with hot water, and its gramophones and sofas, and other luxuries, such as are to be seen in German second-line burrows on the Western Front.

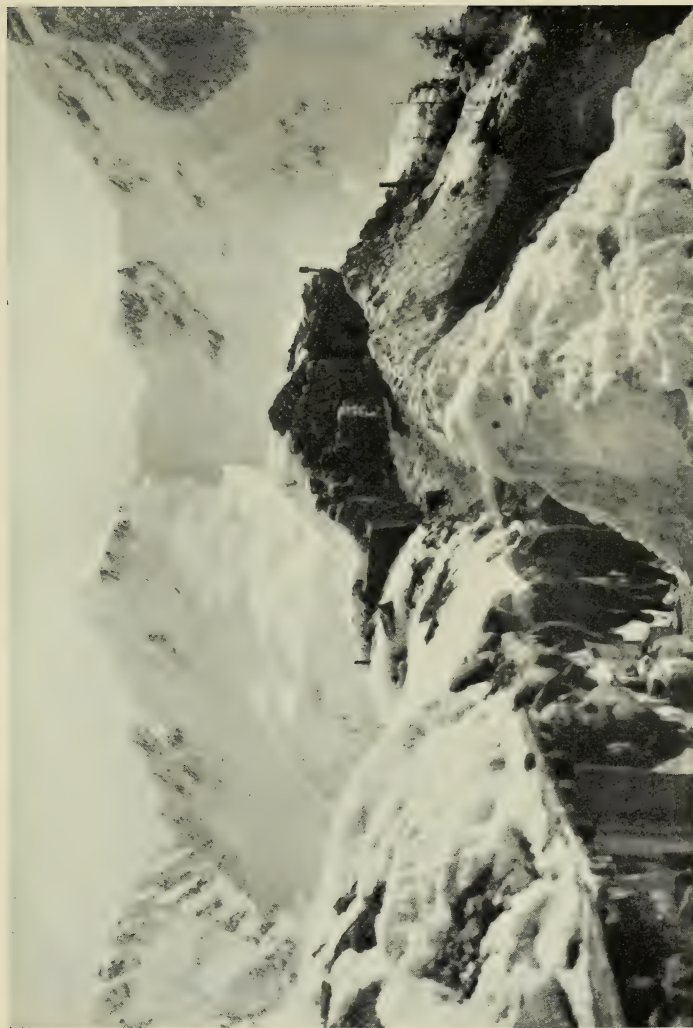
The Italians will be able to contribute some unique samples to the Exposition. They have had rock trenches, mud trenches, ice and snow trenches, trenches in the clouds, and trenches deep in the river valleys. When they made their first advances on the Isonzo side, their trenches, hastily dug and consolidated as ground was gained, were of the familiar pattern, already growing and antiquated: the narrow slit in the

earth, revetted where possible with timber and wire, with a loopholed parapet thrown up in front, and before it a barbed entanglement. These original trenches are now in the third or fourth line, and they are being elevated to what may be called the modern standard, the standard that has been set up since the first half of 1915. They are being converted into forts, such as a fort is now conceived to be according to the latest canons of military science.

I saw the engineers hard at work on them, and sighed to think how the fine old art of fortification, the art of Vauban, has lost its impressive dignity of aspect. Gone are the imposing bastions and ramparts, the horns and crescents and demi-lunes in massive masonry, the great star-angled batteries. Instead, we have long lines of tunnels, floored and walled with concrete, with vaulted concrete roofs several feet thick, and layers of earth above these. It is all so low down, so inconspicuous, that you might stumble upon it unawares, if the barbed-wire fences in six-fold rows did not effectually keep you out. But these mean-looking cellars and passages, well served with machine-guns and quick-firers, can defy the bravest infantry and laugh at aeroplanes and field artillery. Nothing but salvos of 12-inch or 15-inch shell could shake them, and then the fire must be concentrated for days at a time on one small sector.

These works were being constructed partly by military engineers but largely by civilians. Economy is the "note" of the Italian General Staff. They are not unduly taxing their trained men with rough manual labour when there are plenty of hardy fellows who can handle spade and trowel to be had for the asking, or at any rate for a lire or two a day. Many of these workmen are peasants from the adjacent countryside, above the military age, tough veterans, lean, wiry, and sun-burnt, who have wrestled with Mother Earth all their lives. Others were young men who are not yet called up to their regiments, and are put to these jobs till they are wanted elsewhere. All were working under a sufficiently pungent sun with the ant-like industry that causes the Italian labourer to be sought after whenever there is digging and building to be done the world over.

Such trenches as these are made with an eye not merely to the present but the future. They may not be wanted, it is hoped they will not be wanted, in this campaign unless things go unexpectedly wrong. But they will come in very useful in the next campaign, if there should be a next campaign, which is a painful contingency that the Italians are far too shrewd in their appreciation of realities to leave out of their reckoning. These are the fortifications that will protect the new Italian



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

TRENCHES IN THE CARNIA





frontier if any attempt should be made to violate it again.

Trenches of another kind there are which the Italians made as they fought their way up the Carso and San Michele. These hills have not the elevation of the great Alpine heights on the central and western sections. But they rise out of the wood and verdure at their feet in bare and naked stone heaps. They were tunnels and galleries, rather than trenches in the proper sense, that had to be made. The pick and crowbar and blasting charge were needed more than shovel and earth carrier. And, since there was no cover, all the work had to be done at night, a scrap at a time and mostly under fire. The Austrian batteries plugged at the half-finished breastworks, and their blows were rendered more deadly by the nature of the ground; for the rocks themselves were shivered by the shells, and more men were killed and injured by the needles and splinters of flying stone than by shrapnel. It was hard, grim fighting that gained these positions and held them, and the price paid has been heavy. And always the Italians were driving their way upwards against a foe placed above them, in positions prepared and fortified beforehand. Here, on the Carso, the Austrians had turned almost every funnel-shaped cavern and ragged circle of boulders into a stronghold.

In some sections the hostile lines are as close together as they are anywhere in France and Flanders. There are trenches or tunnels divided from one another by a single wall of earth or rock. Austrians and Italians can converse without raising their voices above conversational pitch ; and to lob a grenade over the partition is so simple that the thing is not often done, since retaliation is equally easy, and life would become intolerable for both parties.

There are other parts of the Italian front where the trench conditions are different, and very strange to those who only know the modern type of warfare as it is seen in our own and the French zones. In France the trench-line is not only continuous but it is practically occupied at all times. Some portions may be thinly held as activity shifts elsewhere ; but no stretch of front-line trench, I believe, would be left untenanted for any period lest it should be suddenly rushed by an ever-watchful enemy. The advanced trenches are always under potential, if not actual, fire ; nobody can get into them except under cover of darkness, without the risk of receiving a bullet from a row of rifles and machine-guns, aligned immediately opposite, usually at very short range.

There are many positions like that in this theatre also. But there are others where trenches forming part of the strategic front are empty for

hours or days at a time, trenches which the casual visitor, if he is permitted, can stroll into and "occupy" himself without the danger of immediate annihilation. The line on the high mountains is so long, and it goes over a *terrain* so twisted in shape and so broken by abrupt changes of level, that every yard of it cannot be held constantly.

A trench perhaps will run looping across a valley between two commanding peaks almost unclimbable. If either side has its observation posts on these summits, and its gun positions well back behind them, the trench cannot be attacked at short notice, especially if to make an assault the enemy would have himself to come down from a height and move across a valley or up a long, exposed slope. There would be time to fill the trench with troops when they are wanted to repel an attack, and it is sufficient if the place is well watched from the adjacent posts and fortified stations, instead of being permanently kept full of tired infantry to draw the distant fire of the adversary's heavy guns.

The Italian General Staff has had to provide for a winter war and a summer war simultaneously. Down on the extreme right of their line near the Gulf of Trieste and on the Carso they are fighting in the hot breath of the torrid South European summer. But at the other end of the line, on the

Stelvio and Tonale Passes, the troops are still working amid ice and snow, climbing over glaciers to get at one another, and fighting with rope and ice-axe more than with rifle and bayonet. Here it is a war of sentinels, vedettes, and patrols, with distant guns firing over the arêtes and snow bridges and rock chimneys to which the men cling. No large numbers can be brought into action in this arena ; but it must be watched with ceaseless vigilance, and all its tortuous inlets, and paths that only the chamois hunters knew, sedulously guarded.

Strange and romantic episodes occur constantly in this war of the mountain borderland where Austria and Italy meet Switzerland. On the frontier the Swiss troops are out on guard also, and when there is a bombardment their officers carefully note each shot to see that no projectile violates the neutrality of the Republic by striking at the enemy across some outlying spur that is Helvetic soil.

Many are the epic little combats and miniature campaigns of stratagem and surprise that are waged between small parties of the Alpini and the Tyrolese riflemen, mountaineers like themselves and like themselves wise in all the learning of the immemorial hills. Often the duels turn on the possession of one of those stout log-huts or chalets with which the Bavarian and other German and Austrian Alpine Clubs had thoughtfully strewn



these wildernesses. It now appears that many of the huts have been placed on sites of tactical value, which suggests that the Teutonic Alpine *Vereine* have had other interests besides those of sport and scientific investigation. Germany and her ally were systematically preparing in this region as in others. They were getting ready for a war with Italy—at their own time. Italy preferred to choose the time for herself.

## CHAPTER V

### GORIZIA AND THE ISONZO FRONT

A DRIVE IN AUSTRIA—THE SECTORS OF THE FRONT  
—THE ISONZO LINE—THE STRENGTH OF THE  
ENEMY—CADORNA'S PROMPT OFFENSIVE—THE  
FIRST RUSH—BARZINI'S DESCRIPTION—IN THE  
RECOVERED LAND—SLOVENES AND SERBS—THE  
CARSO—GORIZIA, THE GARDEN CITY—ITALIAN  
PREPARATIONS FOR A NEW OFFENSIVE—A SILENT  
CONCENTRATION—THE BATTLE OF GORIZIA—THE  
CITY CAPTURED—THE AUSTRIAN DEFEAT AND  
ITS RESULTS

“**W**OULD you like to come for a little drive  
in Austria?” said the Italian staff-  
officer.

“Won't the Austrian troops object?” I asked.

“Very likely; but you see there are no Austrian  
troops where I propose to take you, because we  
induced them to retire in some haste a year ago.  
We will go to-day into what *was* Austrian territory,  
but is so no longer—and never will be again.”

It is a fact I do not think Englishmen have quite  
appreciated, that Italy, alone among the Entente  
Powers, instead of having to give ground to the



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

ITALIAN CAVALRY IN GORIZIA









invader began the war by seizing certain valuable slices of the hostile soil, of which the enemy has been unable to dispossess them. Of this the most important was in that wedge of country where the Germanic, Italian, and Slavonic elements of South-Eastern Europe come into contact, and where the Isonzo winds down from the Julian Alps to the sea.

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The Austro-Italian Front divides itself into four sectors, tracing it through the whole of that double loop or irregular S mentioned in a former chapter. The sectors may be briefly described as : first, that of the Isonzo ; second, the Carnia and Cadore ; third, the Trentino ; and fourth, the Alpine.

The first extends roughly from the lagoons of the Gulf of Trieste, past the great ridge of the Carso, along the course of the river, beyond the point where it turns from south-east to south at Tolmino, to Plezzo where it turns again in its passage through the Carnic Mountains. The Carnia section passes over the watershed that separates the Drave and other rivers running into the Danube from those that drain into the Adriatic. It traverses the wild mountainous regions of the Carnia, the Cadore, and the Eastern Dolomites, with the Austrian strategic railway through the Pusterthal and the Drave valley, passing behind it on the route from Carinthia

and Styria to Franzensfeste, Botzen, and Trent. The third sector, from the Dolomites road to Lake Garda, crosses the great bastion of the Trentino, with its openings into Italy made by the Adige through the Val Lagarina, the Brenta by the Val Sugana, and the other streams flowing from the Tyrolese uplands into the Lombard and Venetian plains. The fourth division covers the northward turn of the loop from the western shore of Garda up to the Swiss frontier, where the Bernina group joins the Tyrol system in the huge snow-crowned and glacier-ridden masses of the Adamello and Ortler, pierced by the long devious passes of the Tonale and the Stelvio.

The Isonzo frontier differed from the others in being drawn across low-lying country instead of threading its way among the mountains. Here there was nothing in the way of a natural or geographical division. The frontier was a mere sinuous line on a map, striking south from the Julian mountains and marching across the Friulian plain to the sea. Austria held the right bank of the Isonzo ; and beyond the left bank she was seated on the formidable glacis of the Carso and its saw-backed prolongation the San Michele range, the outlying bulwarks of the Triestine. So here, as elsewhere, she had the weather-gage, the upper ground. The Head-quarters Staff of the Austrian Army of the Isonzo explained the situation to its

subordinates in a memorandum issued at the outset of the operations: "We have to retain possession of a *terrain* fortified by nature. In front of us, a great watercourse; behind us a ridge from which we can shoot as from a ten-story building." It might have been added that art had aided nature in the fortification; for the Austrians had been engaged, for years before the war, in so arming the Carso with guns and defensive works that it might well have been deemed impregnable.

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The Italians did not undervalue their immediate enemy. In England we have thought so much of Germany that we have thought very little of Austria. We have insisted on regarding the second of the two Central Empires as a mere appendage, a rather doubtful auxiliary, to the first, and have hardly ever been able to take its share in the war quite seriously. We made up our minds from the beginning that Austria would speedily break up under the impact from without; we were told that it was a "ramshackle Empire," certain to be torn limb from limb so soon as strong hands were laid upon it.

We were waiting all through the first and second years of the war for the prediction to be fulfilled, and we reckoned confidently on the approaching collapse of Austria all the time that Austria



was fighting, with apparently unabated vigour and no sign of internal disruption, against powerful foes on two of her frontiers at once. To some few of us Austria has been the surprise of the war, a far greater surprise than Germany ; for while we knew something of the resolution, the energy, and the superb organisation of the one Power, we had expected no such manifestation of military and political force from the other. But the majority of us were too little interested in Austria even to be struck by this amazing and unexpected development. We have seldom been able to remember that we are fighting anybody but Germany ; and we are inclined to place Austria-Hungary, as we place Bulgaria and Turkey, among those mere tools and dependents of Germany, which owe such strength as they have displayed in the main to German direction and support.

But those who were in closer contact with the Dual Monarchy took a different view. There might be something "ramshackle" about the Austrian Empire ; but they felt that ramshackle was not the word for the Austrian military machine. They knew that the Monarchy could draw upon a population of fifty-two millions, and that out of this human reservoir it had extracted an army which was the fourth in Europe in numbers, and in quality a good third. They were aware that in equipment this army was surpassed only by those of

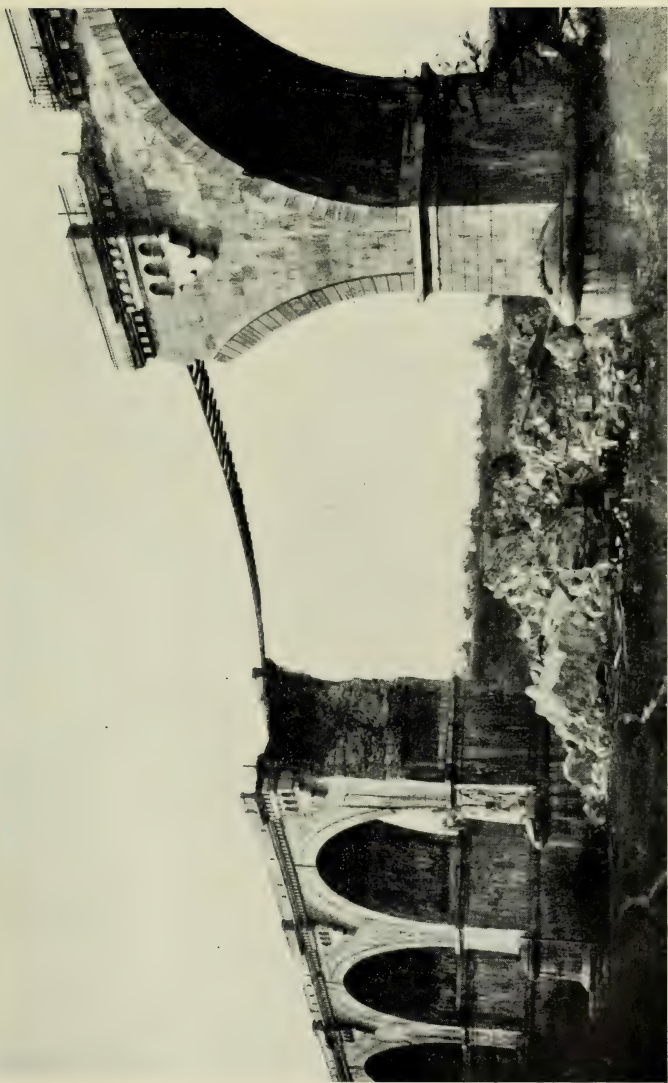


Germany and France, though they did not perhaps realise that in some respects it was even better furnished than the forces of our Ally.

The Italian officers I met showed no disposition to speak slightingly of the military capacity of their opponents. They held that the Austrian regimental officers were less disposed to take risks and incur hardships than their own, and that the rank-and-file were inferior to the Italians in spirit and *élan*. But they did not deny that the enemy's troops were capable of fighting with courage and obstinacy, that among the Magyars, Germans, and Tyrolese jägers there were as good soldiers as could be found anywhere, that there are plenty of brave men among the other subjects of the Emperor-King, and that the half-heartedness of some of the Slav contingents would be largely counteracted by a stern discipline and a traditional loyalty to the Throne and the reigning House. They believed that the Austrian Staff had studied in a good school and was capable and efficient, and they had a high and well-grounded respect for the Austrian artillery. They felt that Austria, with her advantages of geographical position and intense preparation, was an adversary whom Italy, with incomplete armaments and half-empty arsenals, could not have ventured to engage with any prospect of success if a large part of the forces of the Monarchy had not been diverted to the eastern frontier.

Even with this handicap, it was thought that the enemy might be strong enough to gain the initiative at the outset, and bring the war into Italian territory. This seemed extremely likely to happen on the Isonzo front. The common opinion in Italy was that the low country west of the boundary would be abandoned to the invaders, and that the Italian army would make its stand behind the broad reaches and spreading sands of the Tagliamento river. Great was the joy and relief throughout the kingdom when Cadorna took the offensive in the very first hours of the war, left the Tagliamento far in the rear, carried his troops in a splendid rush across the frontier, and seized a whole group of Italian towns and villages, and the entire triangle of Italian-speaking country up to the Isonzo, and in some cases beyond it. Austria was placed on the defensive; and Italian troops were laying siege to the ten-story house from Austrian soil, or soil hitherto marked Austrian on the maps. The re-conquest of Italia Irredenta had begun.

The moral effect of this movement was prodigious. Italy, taking up arms after long hesitation, was peering anxiously into the unknown, bracing herself to resist that fresh invasion of the *Tedeschi* which she awaited with resolution but with some nervousness. And then on the 24th of May, the very day after war was declared, the glad news



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

RAILWAY BRIDGE ACROSS THE ISONZO WRECKED BY THE AUSTRIANS



resounded through the Peninsula that the enemy was already in retreat, that the national troops were over the border, and the alien garrisons fleeing before them in disorder. The most eloquent of Italian journalists, Luigi Barzini, has given a vivid description of that first rush into the unredeemed territory : “ It was the *réveillé* of Italy ! ”

“ Our troops pressed forward in a mood of exultant resolution. They crossed the Natisone ; and then, amid thickets of blossoming acacias, under the glory of the brilliant sunshine of May, in an atmosphere panting with the allurements of the Italian spring, the human wave swept gaily on.

“ It came to the green and wooded bank of the Judrio, the frontier river. Joy changed to a kind of delirium. Tumultuously the soldiers rushed through the bushes and threw themselves into the water, eager to reach the further shore, raising their clanging battle-cry of ‘ Italia ! Savoia ! ’ as the columns came up, in turn, from various roads, and each launched upon the threshold of the New Italy that fateful salutation. . . .

“ Under the vivid sun, the plain spread before them, a sea of verdure, while distant church bells rang out in mingled voices of welcome. Villanova was the first to sound the tocsin. The campaniles of Manzano, of Trivignano, of Palmanova, took up the peal. One after another the chimes gave tongue. It was the voice of the country, the



voice of the soil, the voice of the motherland, that saluted the troops with the antique melody of its festal days, the music of its traditions, and gave to that unforgettable hour a religious solemnity. In that moment the Greater Italy had come into being. The ancient boundary, the boundary of dishonour, was effaced.”<sup>1</sup>

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Our little drive into Austria took us through the scenes of this triumphal progress a year before. We crossed the Judrio, and saw, lying overthrown and unregarded by the roadside, a post striped in black and yellow. “The frontier!” said my friend; “but you will not have to go through the *douane* here or produce your passport.” We went on into Cormons, the first town in Austria captured by the Italians. War was declared on the night of May 23, 1915, and by the evening of the 24th Cormons was in Italian hands. There was fierce fighting in the streets during the day, and they showed me many walls pierced with shell-holes or pock-marked by bullets. But otherwise all was, by this time, peaceful, prosperous, Italian. Here and there you might see a German inscription at a corner or over a shop, and an Austrian emperor still ramped haughtily on his bronze charger in the market place, though they had put a tricolour

<sup>1</sup> Barzini : *Al Fronte*.

flag in his hand. The principal thoroughfare was now named the Street of May 24 in honour of Liberation Day. The *Stadthaus* had become the *Municipio*, and the arms of Savoy had replaced the double-eagle crest above the doorway. There was little left to tell of the alien domination that had held long but transient sway over this Latin country.

We passed on through the perfumed land, glowing with jasmine and roses, with peach-blossom and cherry-flower, in an air and sun as ravishing as Barzini had found it. All spoke of Italy: the vine-trellised balconies, the villas with their tinted and frescoed walls, the traces of old Venice in grey church-tower and Byzantine basilica, the peasant girls walking like young princesses with their yoke of buckets on their shoulders, the large-eyed white oxen drawing the rough wooden carts.

But as we drew nearer the Isonzo we found ourselves in touch with another people, and we heard villagers talking in a tongue that belonged neither to the German nor the Italian family of languages, but to the Slav. The Slovenes are scattered thickly over all this district, and in some communes and towns they form the majority of the population. So numerous are they that the Jougo-Slav partisans claim all this country for the Greater Serbia of their dream, along with Croatia and Istria and Styria and Carinthia up to the Drave

valley. The dream will not be fulfilled. Italy has not set back one foreign frontier to replace it by another. She will keep all her conquests here, and it may be hoped that by amicable arrangement and sensible adjustments the Jougo-Slav aspirations will be satisfied in other ways.

The Slovenes may reconcile themselves to Italian rule, as some of them have done already. The Latin nations seem more successful than some others in conciliating alien populations, even when these have been annexed by force. The Alsatians, in spite of their history, and their German speech, remain French in sympathy. Kabyles and Berbers in Algeria and Tunis get on better with their rulers than some of our own native African subjects. Italy, if she governs wisely, may assimilate the Slovenes as she has assimilated Savoy and Aosta, and as, long ago, she Italianised the Veneti, themselves a people of Illyrian, if not of Celtic, origin.

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We made our way nearer to the Italian front on the right bank of the Isonzo; and from a good observation-point, well screened from the hostile artillerymen on the heights across the river, we could see the long line of the formidable barrier range which held up the advance after that first rapid rush in the opening weeks of the campaign.

We obtained an ampler view of the Carso, San Michele, Podgora, and Sabotino, and we found no difficulty in understanding why the further progress of the Italians in this direction had been suspended for several months.

The Carso is said to derive its name from a Celtic word akin to "cairn"; and a mammoth cairn it is, a gigantic heap of piled stone. This great up-standing bank, which walls off the Triestine plain from the Isonzo valley, and links up the mid-European Alpine system with the Dalmatic and Balkan mountain ranges, is as strong a natural fortress as the world can show. There are groves of oak and orchards at its foot; but after these are passed it is a mass of wrinkled rock, with scrub and thick undergrowth in some of the gullies, here and there scanty vegetation, but for the most part naked stone, its gaunt ribs and blank shoulders scourged and flayed by the relentless sun. Save for the lizards that bask and bake themselves on its furnace-like floors it is lifeless, as it is waterless and treeless; no shrub or tuft of mountain moss, no bird and scarcely an insect can find nourishment over large spaces of this burnt solitude.

The Austrians had strengthened the forbidding fastness by elaborate works. The whole face was veined with galleries and covered ways, notched and crenellated with dug-outs and caves and gun-

emplacements hewn in the solid rock. The Italians, laboriously drawing their own tunnels and trenches up the lower slopes, were faced by Austrian cannon, dropping shell from sheltered embrasures, served by gunners well supplied with food brought along the strategic roads, and water pumped to them through pipe-lines.

To besiege this place was like attempting to carry the Rock of Gibraltar. Yet the Italians slowly pushed upwards, winning a position here and there by a daring rush in the darkness of the night, and consolidating it with pickaxe and hammer under the glare of the day. The Austrians had good engineers; but in tunnelling and road-making the Italians are better—the best in Europe.

They needed all their skill and all their courage here. The difficulties of the advance were terrible. Trenches, traverses, sunken roads, of what may be called the orthodox pattern, could hardly be dug. Boring machinery often replaced the spade; and the upward path was gained in a succession of mines and deep galleries protected by stone-built breastworks. The enemy's shrapnel and high explosive broke with deadly effect on the bare rock, and they scattered flakes and splinters of stone which were more dangerous than the flying bullets and fragments of shell. Earthworks could not be made, for there was no earth except





*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

MARCHING TO THE CARSO FRONT



what the Italians brought with them in sandbags and hand-carts.

Slowly, and at heavy cost of life and limb, the Italian troops pushed on, and by yards and inches drew close enough to assault, one after another, the armoured caverns and the labyrinth of fortified passages which the Austrians, long before the war and in preparation for it, had constructed.

If the assailants were amazed at the formidable completeness of the defensive works, the defenders were no less surprised by the daring with which the attacking infantry threw themselves upon these rows of forts and tiers of guns. It was the Sicilian Army Corps which covered itself with glory in the earlier operations on the Carso, springing like mountain goats up the slopes under a rain of fire, and singing the ancient island songs as they went to what must have sometimes looked like certain death for all, and was indeed death for many.

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From our view-point we could look down on Gorizia, still held by the enemy so that we could not get close to it. We had to be content with a distant prospect of the "city of gardens," with its white towers rising among quivering leaves, and its roofs glowing red and ochre above the silver waters of the Isonzo. Seen thus from afar Gorizia might well suggest, as it did to M. Maurice Barrès,

the idea of a captive princess, with the river flung like a broad moat before her prison, and the grim armed warders of the Podgora and Sagrado hills barring the road to her deliverers. The town lies in the valley of the Wippach, which passes between the bluff bows of the Carso and the last spurs of the Julian Alps, and so makes way for the roads and railways to Trieste, Laibach, and Vienna. A place therefore of immense strategic importance, which Austria had fortified with all the resources of military art, so that it was deemed an Antwerp or a Verdun, one of the strongest *places d'armes* in Europe.

But no fortress can of itself resist modern battering guns if there are enough of them. Antwerp, Liége, Lemberg, Maubeuge, Namur, have taught the lesson; and Verdun was saved not by its bastions and armoured works but by the fire of the French field-pieces, and the heroic bodies of the French infantry. The Italians could have blown Gorizia into shreds by the winter of 1915. But the city of gardens would have been uselessly sacrificed. Gorizia might have been destroyed, but it could not have been held, so long as the guardian hills were in enemy hands. The "Great Push" into the Wippach valley and up the flank of the Carso could only be effective when the Italians had concentrated guns and troops sufficient to silence the Austrian batteries

on Podgora and Sagrado, on Monte Sabotino and Monte San Michele, and when they were in a position to carry and occupy those commanding heights themselves.

The Austrians believed that this concentration could not be executed for many months. Their own great advance on the Trentino front had been designed, in part at least, to prevent such a manœuvre; and they supposed that to this extent the operation had been successful. In order to meet the imminent peril to his centre Cadorna had been compelled to throw heavy reinforcements upon the Adige and Brenta line. Much of his best artillery was sent there, a new army of half a million men was organised, and it had to be stiffened by many of the Isonzo regiments; so that the hold upon the main objective, which was, and always has been, the road to Trieste, was necessarily somewhat relaxed.

The recovery, it was thought, would be slow, even after the Austrian forward drive had been arrested. Fierce fighting was still going on over the central theatre, many Italian divisions and batteries were held up, and the Isonzo army, it was believed, could not develop its full strength for some time. The Italians would be closely engaged on the Trentino, with all the force they could spare, until the snow fell on the mountains, so that during the campaigning season of 1916 no



serious advance could be anticipated in the other quarter. That was undoubtedly the opinion of the Austrian General Staff, which had shifted some of the best of its contingents from the Gorizia sector, thinking that there was no immediate danger there.

They had underestimated the enterprise, the resourcefulness, and the organising ability of their opponent, and his power of swift and silent movement. All through July the pressure was kept up on the Austrian centre; and further east, in the Cadore, the Italians were also busy and took by assault several important positions on the Dolomite passes. So violent was the struggle on this line that during the month the Austrians moved back to it four divisions, which had been ordered to Galicia, and were urgently needed there.

The Italian General Staff had utilised the delay created by the Trentino campaign in increasing its supply of munitions, and in supplementing its *bouches de fer* by constructing a number of large-calibre mortars and howitzers. These weapons, with many other guns and a great body of infantry, were quietly accumulated in front of the Isonzo, and skilful preparations, of which the enemy, it would appear, was ignorant, were made for beginning the carefully planned offensive. How complete and elaborate these preparations were I had some inkling myself as I wandered through

this part of the country before the battle, though nothing was said of them for fear of arousing the enemy's suspicions. Unknown to him (and the fact speaks volumes for the cleverness with which General Porro's able staff had muzzled or misled the Austrian secret agents), there had been going on a reconstruction of the lines of communication over an extensive area, because the network of roads made by the Austrians was framed in accordance with their strategic scheme, and each of these tracks was so drawn that the defending artillery could keep every section under a murderous fire and thereby prevent the movement of troops and convoys.

The new roads were laid during the winter and spring, and wherever possible they were hidden amid woodlands. The exposed parts were masked by shelters formed of woven rushes of a yellowish shade or by high artificial hedges so contrived that the character of the routes could not be detected even by aerial observers. These screens looked innocent enough, and only those who knew the lie of the country well could appreciate the art with which they were placed.

The Italian Staff also organised water supplies, ovens, slaughter-houses, depots of all sorts, and comfortable camps for the troops to rest in. The guns and mortars were brought to their appointed positions without attracting the enemy's observa-

tion, a truly remarkable achievement when it is remembered, as I have pointed out, what facilities the Austrians had for watching the Italian *terrain*. Equally unknown to the foe was the great tunnel 850 feet long, which the Italian engineers had driven to within some thirty yards of the Austrian trenches, and in which nearly a battalion lay concealed ready to spring out and lead the assault.

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All was ready by August 4th, when fighting began along the line from Monfalcone upwards, and some strong enemy works were carried. But the operations in the Monfalcone zone were only a feint, a demonstration intended to draw off the Austrian reserves from the real danger point, the Gorizia salient. On this segment the storm burst on the morning of the 6th with terrific violence. Hundreds of the Italian guns and mortars came into action at once, and a roaring tempest of shell broke upon the town. At the outset, says an acute observer,<sup>1</sup> the tactics of the artillery seemed extraordinary. Its fire was not, as it seemed, intended to demolish the Austrian works or to place curtains of shell behind them. The real purpose

<sup>1</sup> The Milan correspondent of *The Times* whose despatches have shown an accurate knowledge of the details of the fighting, and a shrewd grasp of the tactical and strategic problems involved.



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.*

CARSO: HILL 240 AFTER THE BATTLE, AUG. 8TH, 1916





of the bombardment was to aim at the enemy's brain and eyes.

The artillery was in fact endeavouring to discover and destroy the Austrian commanders' headquarters and the armoured observation posts used by them. A large hotel in Gorizia, from which the fire of the Austrian artillery was directed, connected with the observation posts over a vast front by hundreds of telegraph and telephone wires, was soon a blazing ruin. The Italian batteries rained projectiles on the depots, the railway station and sidings, but left the greater part of the town untouched. By nine o'clock the enemy's brain and eyes were numbed.

His numerous artillery deprived of central control became ineffective. Then the full destructive fury of the Italian fire was turned on the fortifications of San Michele, Podgora, and Sabotino, and again on the rear of the lines connecting the enemy's works west of the Isonzo, on the hills above Podgora, Peuma, and the Grafenberg, with Gorizia. So steadily was the curtain of shells maintained that no reinforcements could cross the river.

A task of stupendous difficulty was the capture of Sabotino, where so many heroic assaults in the past had been shattered with terrible carnage. It is a mountain two thousand feet high, and no man thought it could be carried with the bayonet :

the enemy's entrenchments were too formidable and the distance to them was too great. There was difficulty in bringing up reinforcements owing to the curtain fire which the enemy could interpose from his guns at San Marco and Monte Santo. Only by the device of building the tunnel a mile and a quarter long, into the very heart of the hostile position, was it possible for the first waves of the attacking force to dash upon the enemy's entrenchments without being blasted into annihilation.

“Despite the frightful difficulties the men had to overcome the first line of stormers swept forward, keeping pace with the white discs which were carried high above their heads to show the gunners how far they had advanced, as swiftly as a scrap of paper is whirled by a hurricane, until the moment when they disappeared on the farther slope of the mountain, towards the Isonzo.”

The Italian official statement makes the following comment on these operations :

“The work of our batteries and bomb-throwers on this day was a truly classic example of the concentration of fire against fortified lines. It had for a long time been meticulously thought out and prepared. Thanks to the observation of the ground by our aviators, patrols, and other observers, the

enemy positions had become perfectly known to us, the information obtained had been tabulated, the various targets carefully noted, and the ranges fixed with scrupulous precision. Therefore, at the prescribed moment, a veritable tempest of fire was unexpectedly hurled against the enemy's positions, wrecking his advanced defences, demolishing the shelters, destroying observation and other posts, and cutting the communications. Then our infantry advanced in columns with their usual impetuosity, the attack being all the time supported by our artillery whose curtain fire prevented the enemy from sending reinforcements. Our troops charged with irresistible dash and overcame every obstacle, forming a rampart from the Sabotino to the vital point at the bridge-head of Gorizia. In the open country we broke through the entanglements and the line of defence constructed by the enemy between the southern boundary of Podgora and the Isonzo, and reached the right bank of the river as far as the St. Andrea height.

“As the result of our victorious operations all the heights on the right of the Isonzo, forming the Gorizia bridge-head and Monte San Michele on the left of the river, are now strongly held by us. The Isonzo line below Tolmino is entirely assured to us, and Gorizia is dominated by our guns. Statements made by prisoners all bear witness that the

enemy command was taken by surprise by our sudden offensive. Our preparatory fire proved very effective. This was due to the remarkable number of guns which we were able to employ, owing to the constant development which has taken place during the war in the production of guns, and the introduction of a new and powerful means of destruction in the shape of heavy howitzer batteries, also to the excellent use made of the means which enabled us to obtain a perfect concentration of fire on strategic points of the greatest importance.”<sup>1</sup>

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The fighting continued for three days, during which the troops of the Italian Third Army, commanded by the Duke of Aosta, covered themselves with glory, and gave abundant proofs of their spirit and dauntless courage. The Austrians, though disconcerted, and to some extent demoralised, by the unexpected suddenness and concentrated energy of the attack, fought bravely at some points, and made the captors pay dearly for the intricate positions which were carried in close combat. In one fortified cavern an officer with a small body of men put up such a stubborn

<sup>1</sup> See the communiqué from the Comando Supremo in the Italian newspapers of Aug. 10, 1916.







*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

THE CALVARIO POSITION, CAPTURED AUG. 8TH, 1916

resistance against overwhelming odds that the Italian soldiers presented arms to the survivors when at length they came out and surrendered. But by the evening of August 9th, the attack, "one of the most important and violent onslaughts on fortified positions that the European War has yet seen," had been completely successful, the whole Gorizia *place d'armes*, so strengthened by natural and artificial means, had been won, with the bridge-head and those guarded and forbidding heights which had cost the Italians a heavy toll of valiant lives for more than a year.

The beaten army, in its hasty retreat to the positions further back on the Carso upland where it took its stand, yielded ample booty to the victors. Cavalry and cyclists as well as infantry were launched in pursuit, and the guns hunted the scattered regiments as they scrambled up the ridges. Nearly nineteen thousand prisoners, Magyars, Germans, Slovaks, Wallachians, Slovenes, representing most of the races of the Monarchy, were taken, sixty-seven heavy pieces of artillery, machine-guns and bomb-throwers by the score, rifles by the thousand, five million cartridges, and vast quantities of shells, grenades, barbed wire, and war material of all kinds.

A very damaging blow had been dealt at Austrian prestige, and the self-esteem of the Italians, and their justifiable confidence in their

own military capacity, rose high. The strategic results were of extreme value. The battle had opened the road to Trieste, though the crest of the Carso had still to be passed, and the Italians had before them the waterless and barren tract of country through which the enemy could retire, taking up his pipe-lines as he fell back. The first line of Austrian defence had been wrecked, and a whole system of fortification, deemed impregnable, had collapsed. Italy had good cause to be proud of the foresight of her generals and the valour of her troops.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CARNIA AND THE CADORE

CONTRASTS—FROM FIRE TO FROST—BARRING THE DOORS—MOUNTAIN WARFARE—UDINE TO THE CARNIA—GEMONA AND VENZONE—THE GREAT CARNIA ROAD—NO MAN'S LAND—A HIDDEN BATTERY—THE CADORE—CORTINA—A TOURISTS' PARADISE — BITTER MOUNTAIN WARFARE — ITALIAN SUCCESSES—ON THE AUSTRIAN COMMUNICATIONS

TO pass, as I did in a day, from the first to the second sector of the front is to gain a vivid impression of the difficulties under which the Italian campaign is conducted. Down on the Carso the fighting is done under a sun like that of Africa. But when you turn into the line that runs along the crest of the Carnic Alps from Plezzo to Monte Peralba, and when you follow it through Cadore and under the Dolomites, you are in a theatre of Alpine warfare, in the realms of snow and bitter cold. On the Carso the bodies of the dead would sometimes be baked hard and mummified after lying out for a day on that oven-like floor of

scorched stone. In the Carnia they have been found stiff too, but stiff with frost. Half a battalion of Austrian infantry had fallen on Monte Nero, and as they fell the snow came down and covered them with its fleecy pall. All the winter they lay there, buried deep under their white shroud, and forgotten. But in the spring the snow melted, and the Italian troops witnessed a sight as strange and ghastly as any seen even in this war of unprecedented horrors: six hundred corpses, clothed and uniformed, frozen into rigid images of life, in the attitudes in which they had died.

The Italian plan of campaign, it may be repeated, as worked out by General Cadorna and General Count Porro, was to direct the main effort to the Eastern front, and so open the road to Trieste and Lower Austria. For this purpose they deployed large forces on the Isonzo plain and rapidly drove the enemy back to the river. But they were always liable to have their scheme frustrated by an Austrian invasion from the northern mountain ranges, either down the wide river valleys of the Trentino bastion, or through the passes from the Pusterthal and the Drave valley. These doors had to be barred and bolted, and the best way to do that was to get to the other side of them. Accordingly, while the Isonzo operations were developing in the summer of 1915, and the



5th Austrian Army kept closely occupied, the Italians made a dash for the northern heights. In the Trentino they passed well beyond the frontier, captured Rovereto and pressed up the Adige and the railway till they were outside the circle of forts thrown round about Trent. Near this *place d'armes* they remained till the great Austrian concentration of the spring of 1916 enabled General von Konrad and the Archduke Frederick to turn upon them in force and roll them back to the plateau of the Sette Comuni.

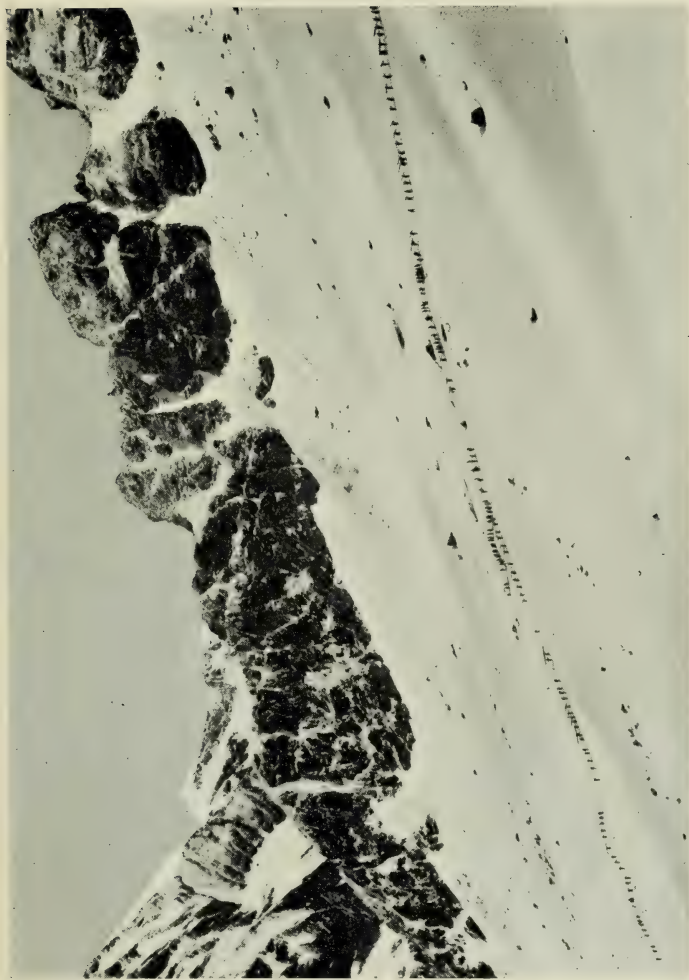
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In the Cadore and the Carnia there are only two main roads, one on the east and the other on the west, through which an irruption could be made. But there are various passes and hill paths, by which, if time and opportunity were allowed them, the invaders could have worked their way down to the flank and rear of the Italian Eastern Army. The Austrians, conscious of the significance of this section of broken country, had aligned along Cadore their 14th Army Corps, composed of Tyrolese jägers and sharpshooters, the best troops they had for mountain warfare. Another good corps, the 10th, under General von Röhr, carried on the line eastward to Tolmino. The passes were in many cases protected by fortified works,

and the heights dominating them on the Austrian side well planted with batteries of heavy artillery.

Despite these favouring conditions the Austrians have never been able to advance in this quarter, where also they were compelled to give ground at the outset. The Italians from the beginning, forced the war right up to the mountain barrier, and in some cases across it, notably about Cortina and Tofana, that district, Austrian by the accident of politics, which is Italian in speech and character, and Italian by the sentiment of its inhabitants. Here the troops of King Victor Emmanuel are in possession and the government is administered by military commissioners in his name.

It is all mountain warfare in this region. The Italians know more about mountain warfare than any people in Europe, except possibly the Swiss, and the Swiss have not their mechanical appliances or engineering aptitude. The Alpini, a picked force, the *élite* of the Italian Army for physique and stamina, are in their own element, and it was largely by the skill, courage, and hardihood of these mountain warriors that King Victor's generals were able to counteract the effect of the Austrian heavy artillery and fortifications, and to capture positions which no ordinary troops would have attempted. Such was Monte Cristallo, which dominates the Ampezzo basin, and on the Italian side shows an almost vertical face nearly five



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

ALPINI CROSSING A GLACIER



thousand feet high. The Alpini attacked it armed with ropes, climbing-irons, and rock-drills. For a week they worked at the escalade, ignored by the Austrians, who never suspected that any attempt could be made to reach them up this apparently insurmountable cliff. But the pioneers drove rings and iron pegs into the wall of rock, and from day to day mounted higher, while their comrades followed up the ladder they had made. Gradually they collected in the gullies and clefts under the summit ; and then one night they stole out on the crest and rushed the Austrian garrison, too surprised and dismayed to offer more than a feeble resistance to these shouting groups of fierce foes, who seemed to have descended upon them out of the clouds.

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It is another gracious journey, for the first part at least, from Udine up to the Italian positions in the Carnia, and on the slopes of the Julian Alps. Before us lay the great crescent of the mountain chain, a curving wall of dim blue topped with gleaming white ; over us the keener blue dome of the cloudless sky ; round us fields sown with wheat and maize, vineyards, plantations of mulberries, cypress, and oleanders. We passed through exquisite little towns, not often visited now, though once they had an art and an art-life of their own.



We pause for a few minutes to look at Gemona, perched high above the Tagliamento, and we glance at the church with its thirteenth-century sculptures. The most curious of these is an enormous St. Christopher, a stone giant reaching half-way up the miniature façade. A little later we halt again at Venzone, another stranded relic of the Middle Ages, with a church and a municipal palace fine enough to remind us of the culture and delight in beauty that radiated from Venice over this Friulian country five hundred years ago: to remind us also that these forgotten little towns, slumbering on their hill-sides, once shared in the brilliant vitality of the Empire City on the lagoons.

Little sign here of the preoccupations of our own perturbed times. But presently we come full upon them. A few kilometers beyond Venzone is the Stazione per la Carnia, where the railway turns up the Fella Valley on its way to Pontebba and Villach. It has now become a great store place and transport centre for the troops operating on the higher levels. It is not on the same scale as the immense installations we have set up in France to supply our armies at the front. There are no such huge multitudes to be provisioned here, and the Italian soldier can do without many of the things deemed essential by his British *confrère*. But there was an imposing range of sheds and warehouses, and everything necessary for the sustenance and

comfort of an army was to be seen in sufficient abundance, bread, wine, cheese, petrol; tinned soup, which is liberally served to the outposts and patrols on the wind-stricken heights and has saved many lives in the winter campaigning; chocolate, dried fruits, clothing, boots, all neatly stacked and docketed. A conspicuous order prevailed: it is an orderly and a tidy army, that of Italy, managed throughout with thrift and care and a systematic avoidance of waste.

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We followed the Fella road, and found ourselves in a wilder and more rugged country than that of the Veneto. Here the place-names brought to our notice that the three elements, Italian, Slav, and Teuton, meet and mingle in this debateable land of the border. At Chiusaforte we were at the beginning of the road which has been driven up the Raccolana valley. It is one of the most famous and most noteworthy of all the roads made by the Italian engineers since the beginning of the war. Before that there was nothing but a perilous and uncertain mule track. But something more was wanted—something that would carry three-ton lorries, and the long-ranging guns that had to be emplaced sufficiently far up to throw their projectiles over the crests upon the Austrian batteries

on the other side. But was it possible to find a way for such wheeled burdens up these broken acclivities? The Corpo di Genio and the Alpini showed that it was possible, and as our car panted, somewhat slowly, onwards we saw the result of their labours.

The road twists up through pine forests, past bare cliffs of rock, on the brink of precipices, with the waterfalls gushing from their flanks and the mountain torrents humming far down at their feet. It rushes along, says Barzini, as if to the attack; swinging from side to side, whirling backwards and forwards in a bewildering spiral, zigzagging up the face of a rock-wall, or gliding by the very edge of a fathomless chasm, but always mounting purposefully towards the summits and the clouds. Sometimes as we went we could see it above us, sometimes below, sometimes it seemed to disappear as it plunged into the bosom of a hill to emerge higher up. It made rather nervous travelling; for at places it clung to the narrowest shelf between rock-face and precipice, with just room for a vehicle; and cautiously as our soldier chauffeur drove we felt sometimes as if, like Kipling's mountain-gunners, we were running with "one wheel on the horns of the morning and one on the edge of the Pit." How they could have guided the battery teams and columns of transport wagons and motor-lorries along these stretches

of narrow, unfenced, track at night it is difficult to conceive. But the road is a fine conception, finely carried out. It showed mind, thought, energetic intelligence, in its elaborate grading, its clever grasp of natural obstacles and natural advantages. Many peaceful voyagers will pass along it in the time to come, and exclaim over the grand views it gives of dark forest and distant peak and foaming cascade.

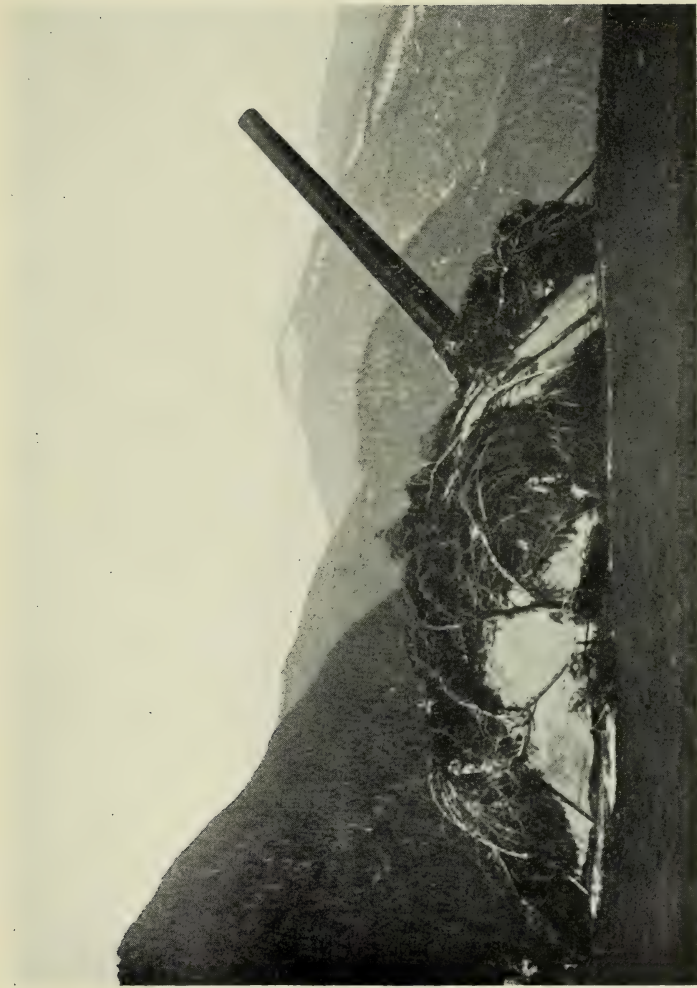
Then came a point where we left our car and walked on to the verge of the neutral ground between the opposing forces. No Man's Land just here is not the narrow strip of earth, strewn with shell craters and nameless horrors, of France and Flanders. Sometimes, it is true, the Italian and Austrian soldiers can look, as King Victor Emmanuel has said, into each other's eyes; but elsewhere they are kilometres and even miles apart. We had before us a wide space, fenced off by many pallisades of barbed wire, and baulks of overthrown tree trunks piled into confused but formidable barriers. All the same, the Austrians are not far away, but we do not see them. In this region of corrugated soil and sharply jutting points enemies are easily hidden from one another, and strange indeed are the daring wiles and stratagems, and unutterably perilous raids by which their presence becomes known.

One's former conception of artillery action has

been curiously modified by this war. On our way downwards we visited a battery of heavy guns, the powerful and effective "280's." It was the last situation that would have been chosen in the old campaigns, when the idea was that a gun position should be one with a "commanding" range of view. But this battery "commanded" nothing. It was planted far down in a wide glen or hollow, overgrown with foliage, and so deep and sheltered that the full rays of the sun never reached it. In this large hole the gunners and the guns were stowed away, the great pieces further protected by roofs and pent-houses thatched with leaves and branches.

I talked with the officer in charge of one of the guns, who had been in this dark retreat for many weeks. Was it not rather a dull life here? No; it was not dull. There was enough to do; there were the men to look after, and the machines and ammunition to be brought up and stored and got ready. One could read sometimes—and he showed me in his dug-out half a dozen books of poetry and science. And then—there were the Austrians. "Listen," he said; and afar off I heard a dull booming. They are not bombarding us to-day; but they may be at any time, or we may be bombarding them. Yet it seemed rather absurd to talk of bombarding anybody from this profundity. For my friend's gun pointed its eager





*Photo: "Central News."*

A HEAVY GUN IN POSITION



muzzle at nothing save a wall of mountain that rose hundreds of metres above it and shut everything in like the sides of a box. One saw nothing, nothing but that great green slope springing to the sky. But it is up that slope and over the lofty crest that the big gun tosses its projectile, to find the enemy's battery shut up, no doubt, in a similar recess somewhere on the other side. The Italian gunners have never seen the Austrian gunners; the Austrian gunners have never seen them.

Nevertheless they can throw bursting thunderbolts upon one another with almost mathematical accuracy of aim. One of the ornaments of the gulch in which this 280-battery was ensconced was a twelve-inch shell, that had fallen here from an Austrian battery miles away, and had failed to explode. It was set up on its blunt end, and the soldiers had planted a little garden of flowers about it. I imagine the tourists, to whom this district will then cease to be unknown, chattering round that memento of the Great War long after the Great War has gone into history.

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West of the Carnia, in the Cadore, we are in a region that the tourist knows very well already. Here the Italians are campaigning in one of the celebrated holiday-grounds of the world. All

Europe went pleasure-seeking and scenery-hunting in the Dolomites, and round about Cortina, and Lake Misurina and Monte Tre Croci. The district was a favoured resort of English, French, and others, most favoured of all by well-to-do Germans and Austrians, who found this earthly paradise as much to their liking as that other paradise further west, the lake country of Como and Lugano. Which of the two is the more beautiful it would be hard to say ; but no lover of form and colour can ask for anything more satisfying than these Cadore highlands, with their contrasts between the softness of the flower-decked valleys and the savage grandeur of the mountain masses, piled in colossal obelisks, or twisted into monstrous spires, turrets, cones, streaked rose-red like an old Indian temple.

No wonder Cortina is a town of hotels. Their guests from Vienna, Berlin, and Hamburg, took wing and fled when the war came that way ; but their traces are still there. The cannon have roared above the terraces and shaded walks where the visitors took the air ; the tinted walls of verandas that invite to long lounging over cool drinks still bear inscriptions and notices in German ; the nailed boots of the Alpini have crunched over lawns and gardens with trellised arbours and tables suggestive of leisurely out-door meals. The saloons where the *luft-kur* guests took their ease have become the mess-rooms of the Italian officers.

Some of the "Swiss" waiters are still left to serve them; a few faded veterans of the Tsigany orchestras cheer them with the strains that used to enliven the diners who came in from walks and drives in fairyland to show their diamonds and drink champagne.

It is war in fairyland; but a war more fitted, one would say, for gnomes and demons than for the spirits of light. It was bitter and desperate fighting in this labyrinth of glens and gullies, of mule paths and goat-tracks climbing among the ragged pinnacles to the shelves where the glaciers rest, and where the snow lies all the summer; often a Red Indian warfare of scouts and guides, more intense and trying even than that on the Carnia, for here the chasms are deeper and the mountains higher. Here the guns and munitions have had to be hoisted, by incredible exertions, to a greater elevation, even to that of the summit of Tofana, which only the more adventurous of the holiday climbers will attempt in normal times. There are batteries, emplaced at an elevation of more than 9000 feet, in which each gun with its platform and carriage weighs between forty and fifty tons. Here splendid work was done by the wire-rope railways, with their sliding buckets stretched from precipice to precipice, and spanning the abysses, which would carry anything of moderate weight, from a wounded man to a mountain gun.



And here also, wherever a practicable track existed or could be made, the small handy Italian motor-lorries, equal to a load of one and a half tons, fed the sturdy porters, who bore the burdens to still loftier levels on their own broad backs and competent shoulders. At Darjeeling in the Himalayas they say that if you want a grand piano brought from the plains a native woman will carry it up the 7000-foot path on her head. An Alpine porter, I believe, would carry the piano and the native woman as well.

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The Cadore line links up the Isonzo and Trentino theatres and is extremely important for both sides ; since if the Austrians could break through it they could attack the two chief Italian armies in flank and rear. But they have not succeeded in getting through, though they held nearly all the crests at the beginning. The Italians blocked the passes, and broke across the frontier in the Cortina d'Ampezzo district, seizing the Tofana and Cristallo masses that dominate the great Dolomite road. They have been steadily, if slowly, pushing forward, bombarding Toblach and Sillian on the Pusterthal railway, and making that artery of communication more and more precarious for its owners. The first rush of the Italians in the summer of 1915 carried them fourteen miles up



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

ON THE FREIKOFEL



the Val Costella and Val Cismone along the road of the Dolomites. Then there was a long pause, for the Austrians, entrenched on the Fassa Alps, strong in number and well served with modern artillery, held their assailants at bay.

But in July 1916 preparations were made for a further advance, and guns were concentrated in the woods of the Val Cismone bearing upon the mighty natural fortress of Monte Cavallazza which the Austrians occupied. Once more the Italians took their enemy by surprise. The Austrians were entirely unprepared for the storm of projectiles which burst upon the morning of July 21, and beat in their dug-outs and fortified shelters. Dazed and stunned, they allowed the Italian infantry to get possession of their front-line trenches almost without resistance. One position after another was taken, including the giant pyramid of Monte Cauriol, which was captured by the Alpini after a three-days' assault, under a heavy and constant artillery fire. The Italian left on the Cadore was thus secured, the whole Austrian position on the Fassa Alps rendered exceedingly dangerous, and the way prepared for a further forward movement which would bring the Italians right upon the railway, and compel the enemy to fall back in their centre on pain of having their retreat cut off and the road to Trent again laid open.

“ Along with the great military advantage won by our allies in their advance,” says an observer, I have already quoted, “ it will be a pleasant thought to English people that the wonderful Val Cismone, Italy’s by right of race and culture—surely Italy’s by right of beauty—has now become completely hers by right of conquest. At San Martino di Castrozza fragments of walls, still tinted the palest rose and blue, ghosts of famous inns, stand out against the pines. They represent the enemy’s wrath at being driven out of fairyland. Farther down, however, the valley has resumed its peaceful workaday life and seems to have already forgotten the horror of war.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times* Milan Correspondent, September 6, 1916.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE TRENTINO BATTLES

CRITICISM AND COUNTER-CRITICISM—THE ITALIAN OFFICIAL SUMMARY—THE AUSTRIAN PLAN AND PREPARATIONS—THE INVASION—ITS QUALIFIED SUCCESS—CAUSES OF THIS—THE TACTICS OF DEFENCE—APPLICATION TO MOUNTAIN COUNTRY—WHY THE ITALIANS GAVE GROUND—AUSTRIAN OFFENSIVE CONSIDERED “IRRATIONAL”—GRADUAL ITALIAN WITHDRAWAL FROM ADVANCED POSITIONS—NEW ARMY FORMED—ITALIANS BEGIN COUNTER-OFFENSIVE—AUSTRIAN RETREAT—A JOYOUS WEEK—THE ITALIAN BATTLE OF THE MARNE—WHAT ITALY DID FOR RUSSIA—THE RETREATING AUSTRIANS HELD—NO REINFORCEMENTS FOR GALICIA—A RELENTLESS PURSUIT—GENERAL RESULT OF THE OPERATIONS

UNTIL the brilliant swoop upon Gorizia in August 1916 the most dramatic series of events in the Italian campaign was the drive of the Austrians down the Trentino in May and its check by Cadorna's armies at the end of the following month. These transactions impressed

the imagination of Europe, and probably first attracted to this theatre of the war the attention of many persons who had not previously found much to interest them in the operations beyond the Alps.

For some weeks the crisis was keenly watched. Many people feared that another nation was about to fall crushed under the steam-roller of the military Empires. When it was seen that this danger had passed the common opinion was that the irruption had been only a colossal, and almost inexplicable, blunder, which would bring its punishment in the shape of a speedy collapse of the whole Austrian effort. The invaders were said to be routed, falling back in complete disorder, and the victors had only to follow them across the frontier and march into the heart of their country. And why, it was asked, were they so foolish as to court this fate by an enterprise foredoomed to failure?

On the other hand, Cadorna was severely criticised by a section of his own countrymen for allowing the enemy to come so far. The late Prime Minister, Signor Salandra, in a hasty sentence, which was made the occasion of his overthrow, gave expression to this sentiment when he asked why the army had failed to keep the gates of Italy closed. Any feeling there may have been of this kind was submerged in the wave of enthusiasm

which rolled over the country when it was seen that the enemy had been held and forced into retreat. Yet even now there is left a good deal which needs explaining as to the action of both sides.

The explanation has been given, in part at least, by the Italian General Staff itself in an interesting review of the Trentino operations issued at the beginning of August.<sup>1</sup> I suppose this may be regarded as conveying the Comando Supremo's view of the enemy's proceedings and as the vindication of its own policy. It is, at any rate, an instructive and enlightening document, and well worth attention.

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What induced the Austrian High Command to conceive its bold but hazardous project of invasion? The answer has been hinted at above.<sup>2</sup>

“Political and moral as well as military reasons appear to have induced Austria to attempt a decisive action against us. Race hatred, embittered by resentment against our so-called treachery, contempt for former subjects, a long

<sup>1</sup> This communication, bearing date August 6, 1916, was published by the leading Italian newspapers on the following day. It was translated and transmitted by Reuter's Agency to the English newspapers; but none of them, so far as I could ascertain, printed more than a few extracts from it.

<sup>2</sup> See *supra*, Chap. III., p. 44 *seq.*

material and moral preparation in times of peace, and our attempt to carry the war into the enemy's country, were contributory factors. The general offensive, which it was feared the Entente would undertake, was another inducement for the Austro-Germans to try to crush some of their adversaries. Our gradual advance into the Trentino, which was approaching closer and closer to the main lines of his defence, aroused in the enemy a desire to free himself from a pressure which was growing more threatening. Austria too laid great stress on the moral effect, on our army and the country in general, of an unexpected and powerful irruption threatening to overflow into the Venetian plain and to cut off the Italian Army from its lines of communication.

“ For these reasons the Trentino was chosen as the scene of the offensive in spite of the clearly unfavourable characteristics of the region from the point of view of military geography, its remoteness from the rest of the territory of the Monarchy, its appreciable distance from the Austrian front on the Isonzo, the enormous interval separating it from the Russian and Balkan fronts with the consequent difficulty of rapid transfers of troops in case of concerted attacks either on our side or on the side of the Allies, the mountainous nature of the district, which lent itself badly to the collection and maintenance of

large forces and to the development of the major operations of war, and finally the difficulties of supplying a large army, which could only be served by two railway lines, via the Brenner and the Pusterthal, which merge into one line at Franzensfeste and have no double track beyond Trent.

“The enemy Command believed that it could overcome all these obstacles by the unity of its forces, which would speedily enable it to beat down our defence, thus shortening the period of crisis; and that by exhaustive preparation it could create in the Trentino, even before the arrival of the great masses of troops which were to fight there, a base of operations provided with everything required by a numerous body of combatants, so as to reduce to a minimum the necessity for railway transport during the period of operations.”

It is shown how, with this object in view, the Austrians established vast depôts of food, clothes, equipment, medicines, and, above all, of munitions. Engineering material of every kind was collected for the rapid construction of subsidiary defences. Many large buildings and huts were adapted to receive sick and wounded, the inhabitants being turned out of their houses for this purpose. An elaborate service of transport was organised with pack animals, carts, and especially motor-cars. Roads were improved and extended and steps



were taken to meet any scarcity of water in the mountainous zones of the field of operations.

Among the "moral" agencies employed to stimulate the spirits of the soldiers were propagandist pamphlets, speeches by commanding officers, parades at which high officers and Archdukes were present, proclamations by the Commander-in-Chief, the Archduke Frederick, with special emphasis on the "hated enemy," on Italy's "perfidious treachery," on the hour of revenge being at hand.

Efforts were also made to persuade the troops that the campaign would certainly be successful. The Italian infantry was described as cowardly and of poor quality, and the soldiers were told that the army generally was tired out and discouraged, and that the people were exhausted by the war and shaken by revolution. "The men were promised an easy invasion and the sacking of our rich countryside and our wealthy cities where the victorious troops would find food and pleasures in abundance." The ideas of the soldiers on the difficulties they would have to overcome were distorted, and sketches were distributed giving merely as the crow flies the distances between Trent and Udine, Treviso, Venice, Vicenza, and Desenzano. And the fanaticism of the Tyrolese element was aroused with the cry: "Let us drive the intruder beyond our mountains. Let



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

DEFENCE WORKS IN THE TRENINO









us conquer for the Fatherland the frontiers required for our safety in the future."

Whatever may be said of these methods, it must be admitted that the material preparations made by the Austrians for their great coup were well thought out, judicious, and effective. They were much more complete than was at all suspected by the Italian generals, who were evidently taken aback by the "intense bombardment" which began on May 14 and 15 along the entire front, and was followed almost immediately by infantry assaults at numerous points. "In this way," says the official review rather naïvely, "in several places our troops found themselves suddenly fighting the enemy at close quarters before they had realised that the bombardment had come to an end. In some places our men were attacked while they were still taking cover in their dug-outs. The effect of these operations varied in the different sectors of our front."

But the general result was that the Italians fell back along their centre between the Adige and Vallarsa, and on this narrow front the Austrian infantry and field batteries followed, covered by the fire of their long-range guns, as far as the strong position of Monte Pasubio, a *massif* on the frontier, towards the south-east corner of the Trentino salient, overlooking the Vallarsa, through which the main road runs from Italy to Trent. Further

to the right, on the Sette Comuni, the Italians were also hurled out of their defences by the prolonged and destructive salvos of the enemies formidable artillery; and after an ineffectual attempt to hold the second lines their commanders decided to save them from further decimation by "a bold withdrawal to the rear," which did not stop till it reached the southern edge of the Val d' Assa and the Asiago basin.

The retirement, which had involved heavy loss to both armies, came to an end in the middle of June. On the 15th the Austrians were beaten back in a violent attack against Monte Lemerle. The invaders had reached the limit of their advance, having driven the Italians from the Austrian Trentino, except in the Lagarina and Suguna valleys, and occupied the sector of Italian soil which included most of the Asiago plateau with several villages and four small towns. "In order to obtain this limited success, an army of 400,000 picked men, provided with 2000 guns, among which was the entire heavy artillery possessed by them, had to fight a series of difficult and sanguinary battles extending over thirty days. They sustained losses of certainly more than 100,000 men killed and wounded, they used up an enormous amount of ammunition and material, arms and animals. The result achieved by them must, therefore, be considered very

modest, and absolutely out of proportion to the effort made, and, above all, to the vast objectives, and the decisive aims the offensive proposed to attain."

Nevertheless, the historiographer of the Comando Supremo thinks it "not out of place" to examine the causes which led to this qualified success, and facilitated the development of the hostile offensive. In a closely reasoned analysis of the tactical situation he discusses the general principles of defensive action in modern war; so that his exposition, revised, we may assume, if not actually drawn up, by General Cadorna and his coadjutors, may be regarded as an authoritative contribution to military science. Its interest is by no means limited to the special arena with which it deals.

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Modern systems of field tactics are based on the organisation of several lines of defences, of which the business of the more advanced, as being most exposed to the effects of the enemy's artillery fire, is merely to retard the progress of the assailant, to break the first impetus of his attack, and to ascertain the direction of his movement. The real defence *à outrance* falls upon the main defensive lines farther back. In fighting on even ground, it is possible to construct these successive lines very

close together, so that the capture of one of them by the attacking force means generally a very restricted gain of ground for him. In mountains the nature of the defences is dictated by the topographical conditions, which must be strictly respected, if an organic and powerful defensive system is to be established.

In the Trentino the character of the ground prescribed the construction of lines at an appreciable distance from each other. Thus in the Sugana valley, the principal line passed through Ospedaletto and along the western slopes of the Cimon Rava group, while the most advanced line was thrown forward ten to twelve kilometres. In other cases it was impossible to avoid constructing the main defensive line a very few kilometres away from the enemy's forts and batteries, though it was thereby exposed to the immediate effects of their fire, because the ground in rear of the line which would otherwise have been chosen, dropped precipitately. It was due to this cause that in the Upper Astico, the Italian line, behind which the ground breaks away into the steep valleys running down to the Astico and Posina, was distant only six or seven kilometres from main positions of the Austrian artillery.

To retreat from one defensive line to another it may be necessary, as it was in the Sugana valley, to abandon a considerable tract to obtain pos-

session of which, in even or even approximately even ground, the enemy would have been obliged to storm numerous defence works and to sacrifice considerable numbers of men. In the same way it may be necessary to evacuate without much delay a main line of defence, which, had it been possible to organise it beyond the range of action of the enemy's artillery, could have held out considerably longer.

The Memorandum notes that another factor favourable to the enemy was the greater facility he enjoyed in moving his reserves. The attacking side, it is pointed out, has the advantage of being able to select the direction in which it will put forth its strength, and to concentrate the forces necessary for the operation at a convenient time and place. The defender, on the other hand, must keep his reserves in position in the rear until the direction of the main attack has become evident. This makes a first victorious rush on the part of the attacking side always possible, despite the watchfulness and foresight of the defence, and of this we have examples in most of the offensive operations of the present war.

If this is true of operations on the level, it applies with special force to operations in a mountainous country, where, when troops have once been despatched in any direction, it is difficult to get them back again in order to launch them



on another course. Moreover among mountains, the rugged nature of the ground, the scarcity of roads, and the difficulties of supply, necessarily render the march of troops slow and exhausting. The Italian command had foreseen these difficulties, and had endeavoured to provide against them by stationing a part of the reserve within reach of the probable front of attack. "But this could only be done to a limited extent. For if we had been obliged to maintain along the whole front of action, and in immediate contact with it, reserves proportionate to the formidable mass of striking energy which the Austrians assembled between the Brenta and the Adige, our military organisation would not have yielded forces sufficient for the undertaking."

It is suggested that the very errors which the enemy committed helped him in part to the limited successes which he gained. "The concentration on a narrow sector in our Trentino front of such an enormous force in men and guns as that at the disposal of the Austrian command, if at first it enabled him to overrun our defences, was nevertheless a gross error on the enemy's part, taking into account the complex situation of the belligerents, the imminent general offensive of the Entente, and the exigencies of the separate theatres of war in which the Austrian army was operating. And of this we soon had proof in the result of the military

events in the eastern theatre of war, where our enemy discounted at a bitter price the brief illusory success he had scored against us."

In these sentences the Italian Command explains, if it does not exactly apologise for, its failure to foresee, and provide against, the sudden attack which took it unawares in the spring of 1916. It says that it did not anticipate an Austrian offensive in the Trentino at the time because such a proceeding seemed to be "irrational." The movement, if carried out with means adequate to the sole objective which could be logically assigned to it, that of cutting off from its communications the Italian Army assembled in Upper Venetia, would necessarily render precarious the conditions of the Austrian defensive in the other theatres of war, and especially in the eastern theatre where the Russian menace was gathering strength. If, on the other hand, the enemy had not such means at his disposal, the Austrian offensive, carried into such a field of action as the Trentino, remote and imperfectly linked up with the heart of the Monarchy, would be inevitably condemned to failure.

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Such factors as the Austrians had in their favour (and it will be seen that they were considerable) had to be off-set by the tenacity and the skilful

handling of the Italian troops. Despite the overwhelming superiority of the enemy's *bouches de fer* they succeeded in containing the hostile advance everywhere, and in bringing it to a standstill in the Lagarina and Sugana valleys. The Austrians, who had counted on a rapid disintegration of the defence, found themselves compelled to make much greater efforts than they had contemplated, and even so had to renounce the idea of an advance by the two most important and most practicable road and rail routes, those of the Adige and Brenta valleys. In close fighting they were forced to limit the attacks, at first to the zone between the Vallarsa and the Sugana valley, then to the sector of the Sette Comuni plateau alone, and finally to

- the southern edge of the Asiago basin. "At last, broken by thirty days of uninterrupted toilsome effort, exhausted by the enormous losses he had suffered, discouraged by the obstinacy and spirit of our defence, the enemy was obliged to abandon the plan, so long meditated and prepared, and on the success of which he counted with insolent confidence."

The Austrian offensive, having determined itself between the Adige and the Brenta, and its line of greatest intensity having been defined in the zone of the Upper Astico, the Italian Command developed its own defensive scheme, based on the idea of drawing the enemy on to exhaust his forces



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.*

A COMMUNICATION TRENCH





in a central advance on a continually more and more restricted front. With this object, while it stiffened its defence in the Lagarina and Sugana valleys, and sent forward into the Upper Astico sufficient forces to impede and wear out, by retiring on successive lines, the enemy's offensive, it effected a gradual retirement in the central zone as far as the mountain barrier which rises to the south of the Posina torrent, and on the plateau of the Sette Comuni to the southern and eastern edge of the Asiago basin. Along this line, by means of a rapid concentration of men and material, the final defence *à outrance* was being arranged.

Although he relied on the success of this scheme of operations, General Cadorna did not quite ignore the contingency, however remote and improbable, that the hostile masses might after all succeed in debouching in the Venetian plain, and he made preparations to meet such a movement by the enemy, and to drive him back into the mountains. A complete army, many divisions strong, and particularly well provided with cavalry, was rapidly assembled in the plain within reach of the mouths of the passes and ready to attack any hostile forces that might issue from them.

I have given some account already of the manner in which this army of reserve was assembled and organised. The official Memorandum pays a well-deserved tribute to the Transport and

Supply Departments.<sup>1</sup> The transport, we are told worked perfectly, and its achievements were certainly remarkable. In a few days the new and powerful army had been created from the very beginning. It had been supplied with everything necessary for living and fighting, and was ready to go into action in a condition of perfect efficiency, and this without in the slightest degree weakening the offensive capacity of the other units embodied.

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The new army was soon set to work. By the 3rd of June, only nineteen days after the beginning of the Austrian advance, the Italian High Command felt satisfied that the enemy would be unable to get through the mountain barrier, and began to make preparation for resuming the initiative itself. The new contingents were selected to take part in the counter-offensive, which was to develop with vigorous attacks on both flanks of the enemy, supported by energetic pressure along the entire front. To hold the enemy in the centre, while the flank movements were being developed, meant fine fighting quality and lavish sacrifice on the part of the Italian infantry. One brigade took as its motto "*Non passeranno*"—they shall not pass. They did not pass; but the brigade kept

<sup>1</sup> And see *infra*, Chap. XII., and *supra*, Chap. III.

the gate with their bodies. Those days of bloodshed and skilful combined movement vindicated, once for all, if it needed vindicating, the military capacity of the Italian soldiers, and they reflected credit on the leadership of General Cadorna, and of his able lieutenant, General Pecori Giraldi, the Commander of the First Italian Army, the Army of the Trentino.

The Austrians continued to make violent isolated attacks at various points, especially on the Asiago plateau, occasionally capturing Italian positions of some importance. "But the sporadic character of these attacks, the diversity and distance of the objectives they aimed at, the very improvidence and the almost desperate violence of the actions which were followed by periods of exhaustion, clearly showed that these final expressions of the enemy's offensive activity were not guided by any organised scheme. The enemy, who had been informed of our preparations and who feared a vigorous counter-offensive, sought to prevent, or at all events to delay its course. But every effort as it was made merely added to his losses and conversely increased the *élan* and gallantry of our valiant troops."

On June 16 the Italian counter-offensive on both flanks began. A week later the Austrian Staff saw that their offensive game was up, and by the 26th they were in retreat with the Italian

army following hard upon their traces. The great invasion had failed. Italy breathed again ; and the unspoken fear that lay cold at many hearts for six weeks was lifted.

The official bulletins of the past fortnight had been laconic and reserved ; they did not say much, though it was known that hard fighting was going on at various points in which the Italians were doing well. Then came that memorable Monday morning when the General Staff revealed the news that one after another the tactical points along the eastern line of the salient were being captured. A thrill of ecstasy shot through the country. Instantaneously the import of the official despatch, with its little catalogue of obscure names, was grasped. It was seen, as in a flash of light, that the forward movement of the Austrians had been definitely arrested, and that they were pivoting round from their right while on their left they were in hurried retreat, hastening to get away to avoid environment or surrender.

It was a week of feverish excitement and delight. The great battle went on, with continuing successes. Day by day, hour by hour, people pored over the map, tracing out, from the now very ample and informing bulletins, the hills and valleys and villages which were being torn from the defeated foe or released by him in his rush for safety. Arsiero and Asiago and the plateau

were reoccupied. The Italians, it was thought, were pushing round where the Austrians were strongest, as well as on their weaker left, and the enemy was on the defence everywhere. Von Conrad's savage scheme to seize Italy by the throat, and squeeze her till she gasped for mercy, had been brought to wreck.

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That prolonged series of engagements and manœuvres between the Vallarsa and the eastward end of the Val Sugana, opposite Monte Lisser, was Italy's Battle of the Marne. It stayed the forward brutal rush of massed enemy battalions upon their vital centres just as the Marne checked the tremendous German sweep for Paris. In each case the foe retired only to strong, prepared positions where he could hold on long. But his advance ceased; he was compelled to undertake a retrograde movement; he was definitely on the defensive. And like the Marne it was, to a great extent, a battle of manœuvres, the sort of battle uncommon in modern warfare, in which success is won by scientific combination and the rapid movement of brave and well-trained troops; not the dull, slow, murderous butchery of the position battle where the result is achieved less by generalship and tactical ability than by pouring out



torrents of fire and rivers of steel until human nature can endure no longer. Co-operating attacks of widely separated units, advantage cleverly taken of the topographical conditions, a design worked out with a statesmanlike regard to the entire strategical and political situation, and a reliance which proved to be well founded, on the fighting value of the troops engaged—all these were elements in the success of the series of operations which rolled back the Austrian irruption, and enabled the Italians to reassume the offensive they had temporarily lost.

It was a battle which in some respects resembled that of the older wars. Artillery played a great part in it ; but it was not merely a pounding of heavy guns, a plastering of trenches with projectiles until men could leap at them from a few yards' distance, with bayonet and grenade. All arms did their share. Infantry moved about freely and charged over long exposed spaces ; cavalry were in action, cavalry in a mountain country, in upland and valleys and table-lands many hundred feet above the sea level ! When the Austrians, after getting back some of their guns, hastily evacuated their trenches, cavalry brought up through the hill paths was in readiness to keep touch with the retiring enemy. Sixty troopers mounted on motor-cycles went ahead as scouts. Behind them galloped the squadrons,

pressing hard on the retreating infantry. They did not actually charge on horseback; but they rode up to within convenient firing distance, and then dismounted and kept the Austrians so busy with rifles and machine guns that they could not disengage until the Italian infantry came up and hung on tenaciously to their rear-guard.

By this close pursuit the Italians rendered a great service to the whole Allied cause, and to Russia more particularly and immediately. One result of the war will be a new and deeper friendship between Italy and Russia. The two nations are drawn together by the bonds of a common effort and a common enmity. Austria is the prime antagonist of both, and every blow that the northern giant delivers at Italy's old oppressor awakens an answering throb in that of the southern people. The operations in the Trentino and Galicia were regarded as the two sections of a joint plan. Cadorna and Brussiloff were working not only in harmony but in unison.

Italy owes much to Russia for drawing off the main Austrian force, and so preventing it from being employed with overwhelming effect on the southern line. Everybody understands that. Perhaps it is not so widely understood that Italy has gone far to repay the debt. Russia is under heavy obligations to Italy for the way in which she used

her great Trentino successes not more for her own advantage than for that of her ally.

Cadorna's victory was planned, timed, and utilised with strict regard to the general situation of the Alliance and in particular that of Russia. The Astico battle was fought to check the Austrian invasion and drive the invaders beyond the frontier. That was a prime object, but not the only one. Another purpose was kept in view, which was that of preventing the Archduke Frederick from removing troops away from the Alpine theatre in numbers adequate to oppose a serious obstacle to the Russian march upon the Carpathians.

By keeping this conception steadily before him Cadorna showed his sure grasp of the fundamental principles of strategy. He carried it out with that rapidity of decision, and that energy in action, which will assuredly give him his place in history as one of the great soldiers of the great war. He gets at the core of the problem before him with a swift unerring judgment ; and when he has made up his mind he calls upon his capable staff to carry his resolution into effect without hesitation or delay. He has inspired his subordinates and his whole army with his own determination and vigour. A leader who knows his own mind, who has the practical instinct for choosing the right path, and who has gained the absolute confidence



*Photo: C. Vandyk, Ltd.]*

GENERAL LUIGI CADORNA  
CHIEF OF THE STAFF OF THE ITALIAN ARMY





of his followers, can do great things. And Cadorna has done great things.

At his word armies have sprung from the ground and have been transported almost through the air. One who knows the general well has told us that on the 21st of May he instructed his Staff to draft the plans for the creation of his new army. At eleven o'clock in the morning of the 22nd the plans were ready. Before midnight the first troops of the new army were on the march.

The same swift touch was shown in the climax of the counter-offensive. The Austrians' official apology for the retreat is that it was undertaken in order to "shorten their line" and confer greater freedom of movement. That is one part of the story, not the whole. The Austrians certainly were seeking more freedom of movement. Seeing that their Italian *coup* had failed in its immediate purpose, they wanted to be free to transfer a large part of the army, which had been wasted over that abortive essay, to their eastern front. With this aid it might still be possible to stem that Muscovite inundation of the Hungarian plain which the Vienna Government dreaded because of its political, even more than its military, effect.

The decision was to take effect from the 19th of June. On that day the Austrian Head-quarters Staff had received instructions to begin withdrawing nine out of the eighteen divisions of their

Trentino army, in order that these might be railed through Hungary to the East. Unfortunately for them the Italian Intelligence Department had good information of the whole project. No sooner was the date fixed than Cadorna struck hard. On the night of the 24th and 25th his patrols, in touch with the enemy everywhere, reported a certain slackening in the Austrian resistance. The retreat was beginning. Thereupon Cadorna ordered a general attack. On the night that followed, the assault was delivered with furious energy along the whole line. It was so sudden and so violent that the retirement of the Austrian infantry, which was intended to be an ordered, leisurely, retrograde movement, became extremely hurried. The programme of delaying the Italian advance with a comparatively thin rearguard, while those two hundred thousand men were being comfortably packed away to Hungary, broke down. The whole Austrian line had to put its weight into the defence, in order to screen the withdrawal of cannon and transport. And the nine selected divisions, instead of going off to fight the Russians, were still kept fighting in Italy.

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By forcing back the whole Austrian centre and left on the night of Sunday, June 25, Cadorna had won the victory which brought the hostile

offensive to a close. But the greater victory was gained in the following days, during which the Italian general compelled the enemy to give ground at his pace, not their own. The pursuit was unrelenting, relentless, incessant. The Austrians had got a long start with their heavy guns which they had been drawing back for several days ; but when their infantry turned the Italians were after them, and kept so hot upon their track that they could not disengage.

In some of the Austrian trenches and billets I saw all the signs of precipitate flight : officers' messes with the dinner half eaten on the tables ; camp kitchens with the water still in the kettles ; clothes, boots, personal belongings, private letters, even official documents, lying about. The one preoccupation of the enemy was to save his artillery. In that to a large extent he succeeded. But he succeeded only by using many of the guns to support his infantry wrestling with all their strength against the incoming tide. If the moving barrier had been too sensibly or suddenly weakened the Italians would have broken through it, and the batteries would have been captured.

To handle in this fashion a retiring army that was or had been four hundred thousand strong the pursuing force must be not only determined but very numerous. And here the Italian Staff again achieved one of its triumphant feats of rapid

organisation and wholesale transport. In those first few hours after the Austrian retreat had declared itself arrangements had to be made for putting a vast multitude of troops upon the tract of elevated plateau and mountain country on which the enemy was falling back. While the vanguard was already racing, troops from the second line and the rear were being hurried forward in endless columns of motor-cars so far as motor-cars could go, then dumped out, and sent marching forward.

In brigades, divisions, army corps, they poured out over the hills and up the valleys, pushing their way through woods and tangled undergrowth, climbing among the crags, and round the shoulder of the mountains. Night and day the march went on ; for they slumbered not neither did they lay them down to sleep. There were regiments which moved through the whole twenty-four hours for nearly a week, trusting to the folds of the ground to screen them from the enemy's machine guns and rifles, halting only now and again for food and brief repose. The mountain mists trailed about them in the dawn, the noonday sun smote them with shafts of fire, the evening wind sighed past them ; many walked like men in a dream only half conscious. The dream would change to fierce wakefulness when the unit found itself in contact with the enemy, and there was an interval of rapid



musketry and angry bayonet work ; until they would come to rest at last before some strong positions which had to be regularly assaulted, rest in a trench, with the hostile guns hurling death at them from the front, and their own pealing in responsive blasts over their heads.

Those long streams of grey locusts, as they poured through the valleys and palpitated over the hills, had to be fed. They were marching through a desert : much of it a lovely desert, waving green, but yet almost foodless and waterless. The Austrians had sacked the villages, and destroyed the aqueducts which supplied water to the little towns of the plateau : the springs and sources which came down from the higher mountains were in their hands. Nearly all the water, as well as all the food for the advancing army had to be brought up from thousands of feet below. In those days one saw huge camions and lorries laden with casks passing incessantly along the roads to the central depôts, whence the fluid was distributed to all the marching and fighting columns by mules and carts.

The Italian pursuit necessarily slowed down as the Austrians at length reached that line of fortified positions, selected and prepared in advance, where they hoped to maintain themselves with comparatively small numbers. Here they were no doubt in a condition to spare some troops for Galicia. But the manner in which the Austrian



retirement was clenched and held, and the masterly organisation of the Italian advance, effected their purpose. The rapid transfer, which might have seriously impeded Brussiloff's operations, was prevented: Austria was tied by the leg, while the trusses were being wound about her.

This great service to Russia, and through Russia to the Allied cause as a whole, was the important indirect effort of the battle. As to its direct results there was a certain tendency to over-estimate them in Italy and elsewhere. Cadorna's plan had probably contemplated, or at least attempted, a more ambitious success than was in fact achieved. He had aimed obviously at a wide enveloping movement, hoping to cut across the Austrian columns by a drive on both their flanks, and so catch thousands of their troops and scores of their guns in his net. But the Austrians did not add to their errors that of excessive obstinacy. They saw that the game was up, and slipped out of the trap just in time.

The Italian general was not able to deliver an annihilating blow. The hostile army was defeated, but it was not crushed nor even disorganised. It had lost heavily but it retained its transport and its heavy guns, which are the prime Austrian military asset. It still lay solidly across the route to Trent. It saved itself; but it did not accomplish either of the purposes in-

tended by the invasion. Even if it had reached the plain it may be doubted whether it could have effected its primary object of seizing the cities on the main lines of communication ; for the Italian leaders were quite prepared for a manoeuvre battle, in which their superior numbers would have told.

The secondary purpose of the Austrian offensive was to hold up the Isonzo operations, by compelling the Italian General Staff to transfer a large number of divisions to the central arena ; and for the moment this object might seem to have been attained. But the success was transient and, as it turned out, immaterial. Even while the fighting was hottest on the Trentino front the preparations for the advance on the Carso were being quietly and steadily pushed forward.

The Austrian stroke may have delayed the movement ; but the delay was certainly not worth the price paid for it, seeing that less than three months after the beginning of the Archduke's attack the Italians had made themselves masters of Gorizia.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A MOUNTAIN WALK IN THE TRENTINO

THE ELUSIVE WAR—STAGES OF INTENSIVE ENERGY  
—THE FRONTIER GUARD—CORPORAL AND POET  
—A MOUNTAIN VILLAGE—DIVISIONAL HEAD-  
QUARTERS—DESPATCH RIDERS—IN THE OPEN—  
AN EXPOSED POSITION—THE HILL-TOP FORT.

**I**N Italy, as I have pointed out, it is difficult to find the war, even in the war-zone. And when you have done so it is quite easy to lose it again. At one moment you are in the thick of the operations, with all the bustle of a full division about you. You walk into the next valley, or over the brow of a hill, and the whole atmosphere changes. The campaign has buried itself out of sight in the convolutions of this broken country. You seem to be left with untroubled nature. “The silence that is in the lonely hills” is with you once more; and unless a bombardment is going forward, and not always then—for these massive banks of solid earth will sometimes muffle sound as well as sight—there is nothing to indicate that

multitudes of armed men are moving and fighting all round you.

In passing from the base to the battle front of a modern army in the field you notice a gradual increase of intensive energy, and a steady specialisation of effort on the object of using lethal weapons against the enemy. Activity is incessant and multiform in the wider zones behind the lines, but much of it looks like ordinary civilian activity; it concentrates itself in a more directly military form as you approach the cutting edge of the immense machine.

Far away in the rear, leagues and leagues in the rear sometimes, you will find the great standing accumulations of supplies, ammunition, clothing, the permanent repairing and manufacturing stations, offices filled with clerks and storekeepers, aerodromes, aviation schools, training camps, engineering shops, sanitary and medical establishments. Move in closer and you come upon mobile factories, piles of stores in transit, injured machinery (and injured men) passed back in streams; then you reach roads blocked and choked with long transport columns, you get among divisions, brigades, regiments in billet, camp, and barrack, and many detachments, large and small, on the march; till at length you touch the danger-belt where the enemy's shells may range, and where your own batteries are in position; and finally

you will see, if you are allowed to get so far, the tunnels and sunken ways and traverses by which the infantry soldier, labouring under his burden of rifle, full field equipment, and cartridge boxes, makes his way into the trenches.

An army disposed in this fashion covers a wide area. Our own straggles over a large part of Northern France and in addition a good slice of Southern England. You come upon it in the French channel ports. But it really goes further back. In a sense it may be said that the British Front begins at Victoria Station.

In the Italian arena the rings are not concentric but superimposed. The front ascends in successive strata. The different stages are marked off by changes of altitude. They are separated from one another by an increase of a few feet in the height above the sea-level. The trench line would be fairly close to the base camp if it did not happen to lie some fifteen hundred metres above it.

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There are some great hill-masses here, beginning in gentle slope and rising meadow and ending in wind-swept upland or rock-strewn summit, where you may pass through all the stages in a climbing walk of a few hours. At the foot, where the mountain stream lisps among the pebbles, all is



warmth and peace. The peasants are at work in their fruit-gardens ; the girls sing as they bear their baskets through the white dust of the roads ; a few villagers sit drinking thin wine outside the *albergo* talking, it may be, of the Red Terror which has come upon the earth, but more probably of mules and crops.

A little higher you begin to see soldiers, loitering singly and in groups, or marching purposefully in small parties. Military automobiles and transport sections pass ; a field battery rumbles by with clink of chain and rattle of hoof. The soft vegetation of the valley give place to groves of chestnut, and then to thickets of larch and fir. Peering into the woods you see that they are in fact an encampment, for everywhere, scattered among the trees, are the tents, shanties, and troops of all arms busy in all sorts of ways. It is like an enchanted forest : alive with things more strange and wonderful than old romance ever imagined. For what audacious myth-maker would have inducted us to a whole stable of flying steeds that can soar over the highest mountain-tops, cleave the air more swiftly than the swiftest storm-wind, and hurl flaming death from above the clouds ? What Eastern tale of magic would have ventured on that thin thread swinging from the branches that brings to this wilderness the lightest whisper from chiefs and rulers in distant cities, and stories of

battles still raging half a continent or half a world away ?

As we stroll on we come upon an encampment of a battalion of the *Finanziere* or Frontier Guard, and are courteously invited by the officers to enter and look round. The Frontier Guard is one of the *corps d'élite* of the Italian Army, composed of long service men who enter the ranks not through the conscription but by voluntary enlistment. Its members are justly proud of their discipline, and fighting spirit, and their general military aptitude. Though they are stationed on the borders they are not, for the most part, natives of the frontier districts, but are largely drawn from Sicily and Naples, and the rugged mountain country of the Abruzzi. They can climb almost as well as the Alpini, and are fine marchers and marksmen. The officers seemed to me intelligent as well as polite, and full of professional zeal, keen soldiers all. Most of them spoke French, one or two English, and some, I was told, German.

I had an example here again both of the camaraderie and the artistic sentiment which prevail in the Italian regiments. As we sat and smoked cigarettes and drank coffee in the officer's mess hut, I noticed certain verses inscribed upon the walls, and made inquiry as to their authorship. A captain with pride informed me that they were composed by a corporal of his company,



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

ON THE HILLSIDE



an excellent poet and musician. Would I like to hear him recite something? The corporal was sent for, and came, bearing a small guitar with him. (Perhaps after all the German sneer had some basis: it does seem almost an army of mandoline players, who, however, are also tolerably expert with other instruments.) The artist was a handsome young fellow, very much at his ease, who first gave us a song from Mascagni, and then "by request" regaled us with a poem of his own. It was sentimental and passionate, and delivered with much fervour, and a dramatic *abandon* that went oddly enough with the reciter's close-cropped hair, bronzed cheeks, and square-shouldered uniformed figure.

The officers listened gravely and appreciatively, and rewarded the bard with compliments and a glass of wine. British officers play cricket with their men, and Italian officers listen to poetry from theirs; and in neither case does the discipline of the service appear to suffer. A little later I saw the corporal-poet directing a squad of men, who had got into trouble with a hand-cart stuck fast on a greasy bank, and I noted that he was stimulating their efforts with a verbal energy which showed that literary study had not in the least impaired the vigour of his conversational style.

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In a clearing, a waterfall gushes from the hillside, a strenuous little torrent. They have harnessed and bridled it to whirl the dynamos of a well-fitted engineering workshop, where they can make or mend most things that an army uses in the field, from the wheel of a bicycle to the armoured shield of a six-inch gun. The workmen are skilled mechanics, doing their military service in this effective fashion, at the soldier's rate of pay. The captain who directs the establishment also receives no more than the moderate stipend of his grade ; though before the war he was a most prosperous contractor and engineer, who had laid down great works, built railways, installed mining plants in the East and West, and dealt with cosmopolitan financiers on equal terms.

The woodland grows thin and stunted, and almost dies out as we rise higher in the bleak mountain air. Just past its edge we come upon a village, an aloof and solitary village it used to be, albeit prosperous in its way, now humming with warlike activity. Soldiers are billeted in all its houses, transport wagons and trucks of stores are parked in the little market-place, the miscellaneous impedimenta of an army lie about the streets. In front of the inn, with its rambling untidy barns for pack mules and cattle, a couple of sentries keep guard, with their rifles slung across

their backs, as is the custom of Italian sentinels ; and at the open door there are two grey-clad and grey cock-hatted carabinieri, polite and imperturbable as ever. "One does not pass here," they say if you attempt to enter ; for this is the head-quarters of a general of division.

You would know it, even without the carabinieri and the sentries, because three splashed and mud-dyed motor-bicycles lean against the wall, and three dog-tired despatch riders, also dusty and stained, are on the bench outside, with their heads down on their arms spread over the rough wooden table, snatching at a spell of sleep.

It must be rough riding up and down these hill paths ; but for the motor-orderly, that light horseman of modern war, no track is too hard and no road too long. What he has done on this front, and on all the fronts, will hardly be appreciated at its full value till the story of the campaigns is told in detail. In Italy, where units, separated from one another by many natural obstacles, have had to keep touch, these swift messengers have done much to render combined staff-work possible.

The actual fighting line is a long way above the village, which however does not thereby obtain immunity from attacks. The Austrians probably know that it is the seat of a divisional staff, and they certainly know that it is a forwarding station, with troops all round and in it ; so they bestow

some attention upon the place, though it is rather far for them to reach. At the actual moment of my visit things were quiet, and the people were busy in their shops chaffering with the soldiers and one another. But there had been a bombardment earlier that morning, and just outside the place I was shown a frayed round hole, where a big shell had fallen, a shell that soared right over the summit looming ahead, from an enemy battery far away on the other side of the frontier.

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Up to the heights beyond the village there was nothing before the war but a mule-track or a rude and tenuous footpath. Now there is one of those fine new military roads the engineers are making, roads so graded and ingeniously zig-zagged that they will carry motor-cars and traction engines and heavy ordnance on the steepest ascents. We follow it up the broad back of the mountain, where the rocks are beginning to jut out of the turf, and the coppices grow scant and wispy. In one of them we come upon a battery of our heavy guns with the pieces dressed up like jack-in-the-green, and the dug-outs and magazines covered over with leaves and twigs. Austrian shell holes are pretty thick on the ground ; the enemy is aware that we have a

battery here ; but he cannot locate it exactly, and in artillery work a miss is as good as a mile. From a bomb that falls fifty yards away you are as safe as if it were in another province. That is why everything is done to elude observation from above, and why even the flashes of the guns are sometimes screened.

The advanced trenches and forward batteries are higher up still. We pass a whole column of mule-carts loaded with food and ammunition for these. They are halted by the roadside, waiting till nightfall ; for if they turned the next corner by daylight, they would be visible to the enemy and would draw his fire.

We ourselves, however, pass the turning at an abrupt angle, and of a sudden we find ourselves in an empty world again. We are out on the bare mountain-side, and all signs of life have disappeared. Armies are hidden about us, but we see nothing of them : only the dark blue crests rising and falling like the waves of a giant sea, with the white clouds sailing over them, and in the distance the towering black wall of the higher Alps, stabbed by shafts of fitful light that streak it with rents of purple and slits of gold. A wild and noble solitude it seems ! But just below the swelling breast of our great hill the ground curves away into a hollow, and rises again ; and on that rise, and at about our own level, there is a belt

of fir trees, and through it we know the enemy trenches run, though from where we stand no faintest hint of their presence is given us.

And are we, on this bare strip of open pathway, also invisible to them? Is not our own position a little—ahem—exposed? I make the suggestion with some diffidence to the gallant officer who is my guide and chaperon. He replies cheerfully, "Oh, yes, they can see us quite well here," and strolls calmly on. But as he is a good soldier and a brave, I feel that there is no occasion for apprehension, and that, for some reason or other, we are fairly safe, for the braver and more experienced a soldier is the less likely is he to court useless or unnecessary danger. Only the foolish amateur does that. Perhaps—though it did not look so to me—the wood was out of range of rifle shot, and shells are not usually wasted on unarmed parties of two; perhaps we were protected by one of those conventions, tacitly agreed to, and commonly observed, in all the theatres of war, by which certain places at certain times are left immune.

But it was a strange sensation: to be alone, as it seemed, in this great empty space of air and light, and yet to look across to those silent thickets, and to know that watchful eyes, with deadly weapons at hand, were peering at us through the trees. I was not sorry when we turned the shoulder of the mountain, and shut away the



sight of that wicked little waiting, listening, wood.

As we did so the bombardment broke out afresh. We could hear the boom and roar of the heavy cannon, the champagne-cork popping of rifles, the rasp of the mitrailleuses ; we saw the smoke-jets steaming on the hillside as the shells struck. An aeroplane, its wings gleaming in the sunlight, spun up into the air, swooped, and rose, and circled, and passed out of sight. Perhaps it had been giving the range to the batteries behind us, for presently these came into action, and their thunder growled over our heads.

We were making for a fort on the very crest of the mountain, now pretty close to us ; but to reach it there was another exposed stretch of ground to cross, and we waited in a convenient gully, with a good sloping bank of earth above it, till the firing should have grown less intense. It ceased altogether in about an hour, and we then quitted our shelter and went on to our destination.

This untimely fusillade annoyed my companion. He was, as I have said, a stout soldier : Austrian shells disturbed him no more than the buzzing of summer bees. But on this occasion they interfered with his arrangements. We had started before sunrise, and had driven and walked far. We had made no provision for lunch, relying on the hospitality of the officers at the fort. But

owing to the unseasonable liveliness of the Austrian gunners it was to be feared that we might arrive too late for the repast, or that when we did arrive there might be other things than lunch to occupy attention.

And so in fact it fell out. The fort, one of the very few the Italians had constructed in this part of the country before the war, was a substantial low building of solid masonry, with an armoured cupola: a strong-looking little place, with a battery of long-range guns well posted behind earthwork ramparts. It lay at the top of the highest hill in that sector of the Trentino frontier looking into Austria across the Val Sugana, through which the Brenta runs and the railway from Trent. It was therefore a position of some importance; and the enemy, from his stations high up on the other side of the broad valley, had brought his heavy pieces to bear on it. The place had been subjected to a severe pounding that morning, and a "420" shell had fallen plump on one of the masonry curtains, flaking off a great slice of the massive stonework, and scattering it into a heap of débris. The casualties were comparatively light—a sergeant killed, and five men injured; but to sit still, even under roofs of steel and granite, while 12-inch projectiles are bursting upon them, is trying to the strongest nerves.

The fort had been knocked about a good deal,



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.*

OBSERVING STATION ON MONTE NERO



and the officers, being human, had felt the strain. Besides, the enemy had got the range of one of their outside batteries so closely that they were changing the position of the guns; and shifting a battery of large-calibre cannon in a hurry—with the possibility that a hostile aeroplane may take a hand in the proceedings—is anxious and strenuous work. Visitors were clearly *de trop* just then; and so, after an interchange of courtesies with these valiant and much-enduring artillerymen, and a cautious walk round the fort, we thought the most tactful thing we could do was to take ourselves away. “I did not dare even to mention lunch to them,” said my companion gloomily.

His dejection arose (quite needlessly) on my account much more than his own, and was due to the fear that he had failed in his duty as a careful host, which was very far from the case, and to a belief that all Britons, unlike his own temperate countrymen, require much bodily sustenance at frequent intervals. So he conducted me, *impransus*, back again through the long descent, until we came to our motor-car, and then in the fulness of time to the quarters of another regiment known to my friend, in a hamlet buried among the fir copses. Here, like the heroes of Homer, we “put outside us the desire of eating and drinking”; and afterwards we heard stories of deadly combats and desperate hand-to-hand encounters and daring



stratagems, such as would have made the swift-footed Achilles and the ingenious Ulysses conclude that they had lived about three thousand years too early for the real heroic age.

## CHAPTER IX

### A REAR-GUARD ACTION NEAR ASIAGO

AFTER THE GREAT COUNTER-OFFENSIVE—UP TO THE ALTIPIANO—THE SPIRIT OF THE SOLDIERS—KING VICTOR EMMANUEL—AUSTRIAN PRISONERS—RACIAL ANTIPATHIES—OFFICERS IN REAR AND FRONT—GOOD ARTILLERY WORK—AUSTRIAN TRENCHES—A BUSY WOODLAND—THE BELLS OF ASIAGO—A FIELD HOSPITAL—THE INVIOLETE LAND—WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

**A**FTER those first few dashing days of the Italian counter-offensive on the Trentino centre, in the last week of June, 1916, when the Austrians were being followed up and hunted out of their advanced positions by infantry, mountain troops, motor-cyclists, and even cavalry, the operations conformed more nearly to what may be called the normal conditions of modern warfare. If the last word is with infantry, the first is with the artillery. The Austrians were being driven gradually back to the strongly fortified line of prepared positions, where apparently they meant to stand. From these they could only be forced to retire by a wide

turning movement, or from mere inability to hold on with their diminishing numbers.

In the meantime each stage of the retreat involved an artillery combat, in which the Italians battered at the enemy's trenches till one or other section was in a condition to be carried by a determined assault. The fighting was intense at various points, but it was not spectacular, and its results from day to day could only be appreciated by those who had command of all the facts : neither the soldiers in the field, nor the lookers-on, if there were any lookers-on ; but the experts with drawing-pins and geometric rulers poring over relief maps in distant unobtrusive staff-rooms. The war in this part of the field had become for the time a succession of rear-guard actions, in which the artillery played the chief part.

It is not easier to see a rear-guard action than any other modern tactical episode, and when you do see it—there may not be much to see though possibly a good deal to hear.

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In the morning we set out from Vicenza with Asiago as our objective. The far-flung plain of the Veneto was sparkling behind us in the sunshine, fertile, peaceful, desirable as ever. "A nice country for the Austrians," said the Italian officer, glancing out of the car, and giving half-involuntary

utterance to the thought that haunted Italian hearts all those months, the thought that the enemy had meant to batten upon this promised land, flowing with milk and honey.

We wound up to the plateau, the *altipiano* of the Sette Comuni, so often mentioned in the official despatches, through tree-clad slopes, passing marching columns, field batteries, transport trains, all going forward. Water was everywhere, in huge vats and tanks and barrels, moving along in drays and lorries, water for throats dry with marching and fighting on the thirsty upland. Ambulances passed us travelling towards the base, and sometimes wounded men, limping along on foot, singly or in small parties. Some had damaged heads, some carried their arms in slings made hastily for them at the field dressing-stations, with torn sleeves soaked in blood. They were tired, dirty, caked with dust and clay, but most cheerful, exulting in the thought that they had been beating the *Tedeschi*. One man, whose trigger finger had been snipped off, said he had plenty of other fingers left to shoot with, and that he hoped to get back again to kill some more Austrians. He pointed to the trenches which ran through the wood beside us. "My regiment took those," he said; "we shall take all the others as well."

These soldiers were full of confidence. They were quite certain that if they could only get at

the Austrians they could drive them out of any position. They have not the slightest doubt either, that in this war—"our war" as they call it—they will in the end gain the victory. The century-long score is to be paid off at last, and Austria is to be humbled and disarmed, in spite of her big guns and her big ally. Every Italian soldier feels that. He feels it so deeply that he does not require to stimulate himself by provocative phrases. There is no "Hymn of Hate" for Italian regiments. Probably there is, all the same, a sufficient sprinkling of that kind of repugnance and dislike which we may call hatred. Perhaps it will give place to kindlier thoughts when the ancient enemy knows himself beaten. In the meanwhile it seldom comes to the surface. What need to speak of that which everybody understands? So the Italian soldier goes quietly about his business, the least swaggering of warriors, patient, obedient, good-humoured, contented.

Only when the chance comes to meet the *Tedeschi* man to man the smouldering fire blazes out. The Austrians are brave enough, and on the average they are bigger and heavier than their opponents. But they cannot face them with the bayonet. Contrary to what one might have expected they dread the Neapolitan and the Sicilian more than the hardier Piedmontese. These lithe, wiry, sunburnt, swift-footed children



of the South sprint into the charge with wild shouts, and eyes that flash like their own knives. They have done terrible work on the Isonzo, and often enough the turbid waters of that stream have swum red with their own and the enemy's blood. None of the motley contingents of Austria, Germans, Slovaks, Croats, Magyars, or Tyrolese has much appetite for a point-to-point struggle with these fierce fighters.

Some among them there must be who are the sons or the grandsons of the Garibaldians, the men who followed the Savoyard hero in triumph and defeat. They are fighting now for the vision of a Greater Italy under another Victor Emmanuel, a soldier as ardent and as keen as the *Re Galantuomo*, though he is not seen caracoling gloriously, sabre in air, on a high-stepping charger. It is not the way of the most unassuming of monarchs, and one of the bravest. Sometimes, when the fire is thickest, the soldier in the trenches, behind some breastwork splintering under the shell, will see beside him an officer, not of his own regiment, an officer without orders or badges, dressed in the same plain grey uniform as himself. It is the King, who has a habit of finding out the worst danger-points and going to them, unattended and alone.

One can imagine how some royal personages would have "spread themselves" over the 24th of May, 1915, which was the anniversary of Italy's entry into the war. King Victor Emmanuel issued

a proclamation of half a dozen terse, virile sentences, in which he expressed his gratitude for what his troops had done, and the confidence with which he expected them to encounter the perils and labours still awaiting them. This sober eloquence struck the right note for the soldiers, who have no occasion for flamboyant rhetoric. They have left their homes and fields *con l' idéal d'Italia nel cuore*, as the King says, and they do not propose to go back until this ideal is realised in a strictly tangible and definite form. There may have been—there were—conflicting currents in the nation. But the Italian Army was out for business.

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We met some Austrian prisoners passing under guard to the rear. They looked shabby and depressed; but most prisoners look like that. A man who has stood for hours in a shambles, and has seen half his comrades killed or writhing in agony about him, and then has had to surrender, is not likely to feel cheerful. It is futile to base conclusions as to the *morale* of an army on the demeanour of captured men fresh from the firing line. Some of these prisoners, at any rate, seemed in good physical condition, and had apparently been well fed. The Austrian officers, I was told, are apt to sulk and give all the trouble they can.



*Photo: Russell and Sons.]*

☞ H.M. THE KING OF ITALY



As for the rank and file, some are by no means unwilling to be taken, especially the Slovenes and Serbs and other Slavs, and, of course, the Italians, though of these not many are to be found in this theatre. The Vienna War Office naturally prefers that they should be employed as far from Italy as possible : a number of them have been captured by the Russians in Galicia and sent back to Italy, where they are now fighting joyously in the ranks of the country to which they hope they will soon owe political, as well as sentimental, allegiance.

Also, as might be expected, the prisoners do not always get on well together. An Italian patrol captured a small party of Austrians, of whom one was bleeding from a bayonet thrust in the stomach. The officer in command ordered the wounded man to be carried by two of the other prisoners. Before they had gone far the bearers calmly set down their burden. The Italian officer demanded an explanation. " We are going to leave this fellow here," was the reply. " Why ? " " We are tired of carrying him." " Surely," said the officer, " you want to save your wounded comrade ? " " He is no comrade of ours, he is only a Bosnian." " Ah ! And what may you be ? " " We are Hungarians." These haughty Magyars were induced to reconsider the matter by a curt hint that if they did not at once obey the orders given



them they would speedily find themselves unable to receive or execute any other orders whatsoever.

One hears many stories of the racial feuds and antipathies in the ranks of the enemy. One hears too that the Austrian officers mistrust their men (or mistrust themselves) too deeply to lead them into action. They prefer to remain behind the rear rank, where, with finger on trigger, they are ready to shoot down any soldier who shows a sign of wavering. Austria, like Prussia, is still in the atmosphere of the eighteenth century, when kings traded away their troops like cattle, and treated them like slaves. "The life the private soldier led was a frightful one to any but men of iron courage and endurance. There was a corporal to every three men, marching behind them and pitilessly using the cane ; so much so that it used to be said that in action there was a front rank of privates and a second rank of sergeants and corporals to drive them on."<sup>1</sup>

Italy has no such numbing memories. Her wars for the past hundred years have been popular wars, and her soldiers are led—not driven—into battle. The behaviour of Italian officers is governed by the same convention, in this matter, as the British, an honourable, though it may be a wasteful and impolitic, convention. When peril is to be faced the officers go

<sup>1</sup> Thackeray : *Barry Lyndon*, Chap. VI.

in front of their men to meet it ; and in consequence the tale of casualties among them has been a long one. I have been told that one of the Austrian army-commanders issued an order of the day, directing that officers should be picked off by good marksmen whenever possible. He added that there would be no difficulty in identifying them ; because, though their uniforms were practically indistinguishable from those of the rank and file, they could always be known by their habit of exposing themselves to the hottest fire.

It is probably true that the officers who fight under the black-and-yellow flag are much inferior in gallantry and spirit to those who are striking for the tricolour of Italy. Yet some of the Austrian regiments are brave enough, and they can put up a good fight sometimes, even when it comes to close quarters. But as a rule, here as elsewhere, it is a war of artillery. The gun, particularly the big gun, is the controlling factor. And the Austrian gunners can shoot straight, or some of them can. Even the civilian visitor to the front discovers that, in spite of the almost painful solicitude with which courteous Italian staff-officers endeavour to keep him out of harm's way. He may be rolling swiftly along a road, when no actual bombardment is going on, and everything seems tranquil. But a keen-eyed Austrian artillery observer in some distant battery, perched up among the clouds,

may think it worth while to waste a shot on him, and a burst of shrapnel just over or in front of his car may cause him to turn back or seek hasty shelter. Gunners who can snipe a motor-car, running at thirty miles an hour, with a big gun, at a range of five or six kilometres, must be fairly expert at their business.

It happened that the head-quarters staff of an Italian army were due to arrive in a certain small town, and arrangements had been made for them to pass the night at a house which was painted pink. For some reason the plan was changed at the last moment, and the staff went to a white house in another part of the town. But hardly had they settled themselves in their lodgings when a shell from a long-range gun dropped plump on the pink house and blew it to pieces. This was the only shot fired that night; and the nearest Austrian heavy battery was four miles distant. So if the hit was not a sheer accident it speaks well for the efficiency both of the Austrian secret service and the Austrian range-finding.

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We were in a patch of wooded country on the plateau of the Sette Comuni in front of Asiago. The Austrians had drawn their trenches through these thickets, and had evacuated them before the

advance of Cadorna's divisions barely thirty hours earlier. These abandoned trenches of the enemy showed distinct traces of the pounding they had received from the Italian guns, and were altogether in a poor condition, roughly made, and by no means up to the best modern standard of earthwork. The pioneers and territorials had been busy removing arms and ammunition and other things of value, and there was nothing here for the souvenir hunter, except occasional fuses and empty shell cases; but the trenches were still littered with scraps of equipment, torn fragments of clothing, and filth of various kinds, and were not at all inviting. A few red pools stagnating in the trampled clay did not add to their attractiveness. One had heard a good deal of the Austrian officers' dugouts and sleeping-quarters, sometimes floored and boarded, and provided with tables and mirrors and bedding looted from the occupied villages. Here, however, there was nothing of the sort: only dirt and squalor, and the disagreeable signs of an army, rather careless of sanitation, driven in haste, and with loss, out of its positions.

The enemy, forced from this ground, had retired through Asiago, and the Italians were trying to push him from the heights beyond the town to which he had withdrawn his batteries. The rear-guard action was going on, and we were well in the middle of the artillery part of it. No guns



were to be seen—guns in modern warfare are strangely invisible—but they were all round us, and sudden bursts of sound seemed to arise from the earth in disturbing proximity and promiscuity. A furious bellow on your left was answered by a thunderclap on the right, or a savage bark apparently close behind your head. The trees were shivering and shaking with the crash of the heavy Italian cannon—in reality these were a good distance in our rear—and the whine and screech of the flying Austrian shell.

The most curious part of the affair was the detached and almost uninterested attitude of all around us to this ear-racking interchange of deadly missiles. Nobody seemed to pay any particular attention to the bombardment. Yet it was by no means harmless. Not many minutes before our motor-car passed along the road that intersected the wood a shell had fallen near the spot at which we were to alight, killing three men and wounding twenty others. The wounded had been carried away, and the dead covered over with rugs and tarpaulins, for the Italian officers, always considerate and polite, had thought that the sight of the bodies might distress us.

But such incidents did not in the least interfere with the prevailing activity. A lot of work was going on, and everybody was far too much occupied to attend to irrelevant matters. Trenches were being



cleared and renovated, waggons unloaded, stores stacked, food cooked, great water barrels rolled up and emptied into tanks. It was a scene of ordered, you might almost think of peaceful industry, to that orchestral accompaniment of drumming cannon bass and the howling treble of the shell. And that is a modern battle again: an odd collection of disconnected interludes, one man dying while another skins potatoes, one battalion locked in a life-and-death struggle with the bayonet, while hard by another in its shirt sleeves, with pipe and jest, is nailing shacks of timber. Just here all this noise and pother of bombardment seemed to be regarded as the private affair of the artillerists far away in front and rear. The working colony in the wood had its own business to get on with.

Later in the day when we passed this place again we found that the engineer officers, who had their quarters close at hand, had brought out bottles and glasses in our honour. We drank to the Italian and British armies, and exchanged compliments and polite little speeches, unconcerned by the minor tragedy wrought by the Austrian projectile almost on that very spot. Soldiers are not callous to loss and suffering; but they acquire the habit of locking off their thoughts in separate compartments, so that they can throw themselves into the occupa-

tion of the passing moment without being weighed down by what has gone before or what may come after. For if they were perpetually pausing to think of all the horror and misery that wells round their feet they could not endure the strain of war, and keep their health and spring.

“These deeds must not be thought  
After these ways ; so, it will make us mad.”

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The forest ended abruptly, and there was a clear little run of open road, between high ground, down into Asiago. But it was a little run not “healthy” to take just then. The Austrians had evacuated and set fire to the town ; but from their batteries on Monte Mosciagh and Monte Interrotto, the broad hills rising five thousand feet above the valley, they were still pumping projectiles into it. Just at the entrance to Asiago, from our side, the road crosses a stream ; and every few minutes there would be a splash of flame in front of the bridge, a warning that the right of way was barred. While we were looking on a couple of officers in an automobile tried to run the gauntlet. But the Austrian gunners were too quick for them. Their car had almost reached the bridge when a shell burst, as it seemed to the spectators, clean under it. Presently we saw that

the officers had scrambled out, and that the car was still standing on its wheels. Later in the day the chauffeur contrived to bring it back, and we inspected it and him. The shell had exploded a little to one side, and merely shattered the tonneau, leaving the engine uninjured. The chauffeur had been slightly touched in the cheek by a splinter of metal. It was one of those narrow escapes that occur every day, and every hour of the day.

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Asiago being clearly out of bounds for the moment, we made our way by a field-path to a rounded green knoll above the road on the right. Here we could see down into the town about a couple of kilometres away, and we could make out the line of the Italian trenches which had been carried to Camporovere, the village beyond it. We could also see Mosciagh and the other hills, billowing away to the horizon, on which the enemy still was planted. Asiago had been burnt by the Austrians when they marched out, according to their amiable and civilised custom. The day before our visit the town was still in flames ; but by this time the fire had died away except for a few wisps of smoke. Surveyed from our eminence the place did not look so badly damaged as in fact it was, and at a little distance the clustered

white walls and red-tiled Venetian roofs were pretty enough. The fine old church, with its tall campanile, though gutted and wrecked inside, still stood.

Of this campanile a strange story is told. Despite the bombardment and the fire the bells hung balanced in their turret frame. The day after the evacuation the fight was hot and eager about Asiago. At its climax an Austrian shell exploded inside the tower, and the blast shook the silent bells and set them chiming again. The sweet and mellow notes quivered over the battlefield, plainly heard, in their soft clearness, through the thud of cannon and the tumult of the rifles : passing bells tolling the knell for the dead, or joy-bells, as the Italian soldiers fiercely said, ringing in the victory of the living.

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We did not stay too long on our green knoll, and we were warned to keep pretty close to the ground, and stand apart ; for if the Austrians had seen us in a group using field-glasses they might have thought the Italians were making the place an artillery observation post, and favoured us with a round of shrapnel. “ Then they command this point ? ” I asked an Italian officer. “ Command this point ! ” he answered bitterly ; “ they

command all points. Do you not know, my friend, that they are above us everywhere? Look there—and there—and there,” and he showed me a pink barrack high up on the top of a great hill, and then one huge bluff or frowning summit after another, all round the northern and western horizon, where the Austrians were, Austrian guns, Austrian posts. For that is the way of this war.

But though we could not get into Asiago, there were people coming out of it all the time. From the advanced trenches in front a scattered procession trickled thinly through the town, a procession of the stretcher-bearers and the wounded. The ambulances had to wait round the corner in the shelter of the wood; but the wounded men dragged themselves along the road, and the red-crossed orderlies carried their burdens. Sometimes the burden had died on its way, and lay still and stiff on the stretcher.

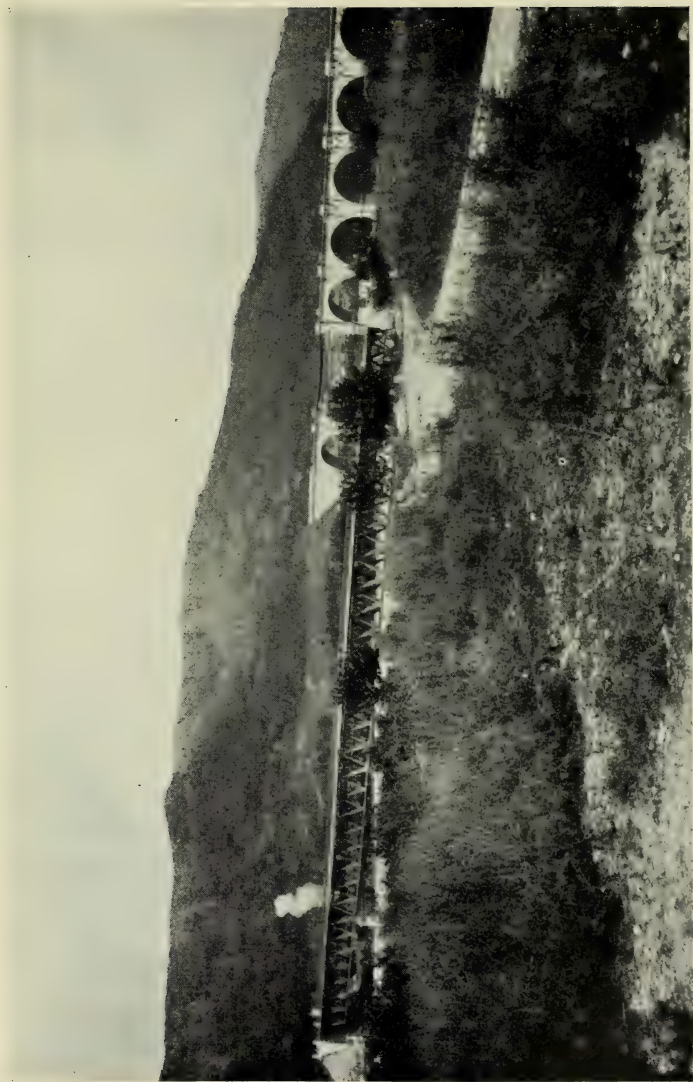
Behind our view-point was a farmhouse turned field hospital, the nearest in this quarter to the firing line. Here the bearers of the wounded and the bearers of the dead set down their loads. A bearded and spectacled captain of the *Corpo Sanitario* and two subaltern doctors were hard at work. They were haggard from want of rest, and the white blouses they wore over their uniforms were stained and smeared with blood. An operating-table had been made up in the living-room of the farmstead;



wounded men were strewn on the floor or propped against the walls of the big barn ; others lay in the cattle yard ; and in the damp straw were turbid pools of crimson, and red puddles oozing under the dung. It was no place for idle curiosity, and there was nothing incompetent hands could do to help the skilful ones ministering here.

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The bombardment gave way to a rattle of musketry, and later we learnt that the Italians had mastered the Austrian fire and captured some more trenches in an infantry attack. We drove through the wood again, and down the winding hill-paths, and across the plain once more, and so back to Vicenza. And as we passed through the streets of that historic little city, where the genius of the Italian renaissance is so nobly enshrined in palace and loggia, when we saw the people going quietly and cheerfully about their pleasures and their business, we thought of the men lying in their blood out there at the hill-side farm, and we felt that their offering had not been given in vain, since it had kept all this heritage of beauty and ordered prosperity from violation and sacrilege. We remembered Belgium ruined and enslaved, Poland plundered, Serbia given over to rapine and torture, and we shuddered



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

**RAILWAY BRIDGE ACROSS THE ISONZO UNDER AUSTRIAN ARTILLERY FIRE**



to think of the worse fate that would have befallen this garden-land of Northern Italy if the marauders had been able to work their evil will upon it. And again we blessed the valour of the soldiers, and the wise dispositions of the generals, by which humanity had been spared a tragedy more heart-rending even than that of the Belgians, the Poles, and the Serbs.

## CHAPTER X

### WAR AMID THE ETERNAL SNOWS

THE ALPINE CAMPAIGN—WITH THE MOUNTAIN TROOPS—THE WIRE-ROPE RAILWAYS—THE RIFUGIO—CROSSING THE GLACIER—A BATTLE ON THE ICE—THE SUMMIT CAMP—THE LATEST NEWS AT TEN THOUSAND FEET—A WONDERFUL ACHIEVEMENT.

“**H**ERE,” said the subaltern of the Alpine Regiment, “I had my bedroom, dressing-room, dining-room, and orderly-room for four months of last winter.”

“Here?” I gasped; “but in Heaven’s name *where?*”

He pointed to a round hole in the great bank of snow beside us, and invited me to enter. I crawled through and found myself in a square cave, some twelve feet across, walled, floored, and roofed with the dry and beaten snow. In this dug-out the lieutenant lived through those weeks when the Italians had set their first outposts on the frontier ridge. Here my young friend had slept, and eaten his tinned rations, and done office work for the



handful of soldiers stranded with him in the Arctic waste. In odd moments he lay on his blankets and gazed out of the entrance-hole to watch the crests turn rose and gold in the wintry dawn, and if the day was clear to look across into Switzerland and catch glimpses of Monte Rosa and the Jungfrau rising in dim pyramids of ghostly silver on the far horizon. About us stretched a superb panorama of blanched peak, and black rock-steeple, and dark purple summit, magnificent in its savage loneliness. Nature, you would say, is here in its naked elemental force, and man has no place in this abode of "height and cold, the splendour of the hills." Yet in this wilderness men, for many months, have had their pigmy shelters, and fought their little battles under the silent eyes of the disdainful peaks, and left the stain of their blood upon the whiteness of the eternal snows.



Rugged, broken, and lofty throughout its whole length the frontier touches some of the highest ground in Europe at its north-western corner where Austria and Italy abut upon Switzerland. Here we reach mountains of ten thousand, eleven thousand, twelve thousand feet in altitude; here fighting goes on not merely among rocks and precipices but over glaciers and ice-slopes; here

guns are emplaced and troops stationed above the snow-line ; here, even in the midst of summer, they go swathed in furs, they use skis, and drag sleighs, they move with rifles slung on their backs, and iron-shod poles and ice-axes in their hands. Here the elaborate accessories of modern warfare—shells, grenades, barbed wire, telephone installations, besides bodies of infantry and batteries of artillery—have had to be transported to heights inaccessible before to all save the mountaineering athlete climbing cautiously and slowly with ropes and guides.

The Stelvio Pass and the Tonale Pass come down into Italy through the mountain masses of the Tyrol, one under the ice-clad shoulder of the Ortler, the other running between the Cevedale and Adamello groups, giants all, ranking not far below the champions of the Jura and the Oberland. Great armies, with a wide front, could not march down these passes ; but considerable columns, with guns, could do so, and thereby turn the left flank of the Italian defence and reach Verona and perhaps Milan and the trunk line of the main railway that runs from the French frontier to the Adriatic. Hence it was necessary for the Italians to keep these back-entries closed, and themselves, if they could, push through them. So a bitter campaign has been carried on amid the mountains that dominate the passes, and the

valleys that debouch into them, a campaign which in its circumstances and incidents is unprecedented in the history of war. For neither Hannibal, nor Suwaroff, nor Napoleon, nor any other leader of an Alpine march, had to keep his troops fighting month after month on the mountain-tops, and furnish them in that situation with artillery and ammunition.

Thanks to the courtesy of the general staffs of the First Italian Army, and of one of the Divisions specially engaged in these operations, seconded by the kind attentions of the officers of certain Alpine regiments, I was enabled to see something of these matters at close quarters. I was anxious to go beyond the head of the teleferic railways which has been the bourne of most of the journalistic inquirers, Italian and foreign; and my friendly guides were good enough to indulge my wish, so that I was able to traverse a glacier lying far beyond the wire-rope terminus, and to spend a day and a night with a body of the Alpini in one of their most advanced posts, on what was formerly Austrian territory, nearly ten thousand feet above the sea-level, and separated only by a narrow strip of ice and snow-covered rock from the enemy's lines. It was an interesting experience since it allowed me to appreciate the difficulties the Italians have overcome in bringing guns and stores to these lofty positions, and to examine the actual

conditions under which their arduous vigil is maintained.

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Far, far below that frozen crest which was my objective the — Regiment of Alpini, with sundry details of transport, artillery, and engineers, have their headquarters in a green and pleasant valley. The little town in peace time is a minor tourist centre, with a couple of hotels and a few village shops, and with guides and porters for the climbers who would adventure the ascent of the Adamello and Cevedale peaks. There are no tourists now, for they could not get a pass to come here ; one hotel is a hospital, the other filled with officers ; the guides wear King Victor Emmanuel's uniform and on their hats the eagle badge of the Alpine Corps. The soldiers of these battalions are mostly men of the frontier districts, mountaineers wise in all the learning of the everlasting hills, or hardy peasants who can carry burdens like their own mules and march all day on tireless feet.

They are a *corps d'élite*, immensely proud of themselves and their traditions, with a profound belief in their ability to go anywhere and do anything : an alert, upstanding, keen-eyed lot, bronzed, tough, and sinewy, with muscular backs and business-like legs. Better troops for their work are not to be found anywhere, not even





*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

A VEDETTE OF THE ALPINI





among their rivals, the Tyrolese *feldjägers*, or in the excellent Alpine battalions of the French Army.

Their officers are hard-working men, too : some are regular soldiers, others young fellows of the northern towns, with a taste for open-air life, who prefer to put in their term of service with the local corps rather than with the duller line or the more expensive cavalry. Among my hosts at —— was a colonel, who had seen service in Erythraea and Tripoli, a doctor who had been with the British in the Sudan and the Belgians on the Congo, captains and lieutenants who were lawyers and engineers, called up from their offices to take their place with their old regiments on mobilisation. They were essentially middle-class folks—the Alpine regiments do not as a rule attract the aristocracy or the wealthy—a vivacious, well-informed, agreeable set, who had made themselves comfortable in the villa requisitioned for their use, and entertained me with a most genial hospitality.

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I left them with reluctance in the early morning, in company with one of their number, a young sub-lieutenant who had broken off his studies at the university to take a commission in the Alpini. We had also two soldiers of the regiment who bore our heavy overcoats, and various other belongings,

besides their own rifles, kit, and accoutrements. We, the lieutenant and myself, were mounted on excellent army mules, which went along the winding road at a smart trot ; the soldiers were on foot, but by taking short cuts across the fields and choosing convenient hill-paths they were always able to keep pace with us. Sometimes we missed them for a quarter of an hour at a time, only to find them waiting for us at some turn of the track.

We turned out of the valley into a road that wound and twisted its way into the heart of the hills. The giants were before us now and hung over us as we followed the wriggling track, sometimes showing us a great wedge of threatening grey shoulder, sometimes a scarred face of black rock with the ice-fields gleaming in the furrows, sometimes a snowy cone rising clear and aloof into the thin sky under its hood of spotless white. At a mountain tarn, set like a blue gem in its basin of brown cliff and dark green fell, the road ended and we left our mules. "Here," said my guide, "we walk a little way and then we go up by the teleferic."

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I had heard much of these wire-rope railways, which have played a great part in the campaign. The teleferic is the box or basket which runs suspended on grooved wheels from an overhead wire. The system has been adopted, in one form

or another, all over the world, for hauling goods up the side of mountains and across chasms. The Italians, and I believe the Austrians, also on their side of the border, have made extensive use of it, and have employed it for the transport of human beings as well as inanimate objects.

For the former purpose it does not at first sight look attractive. The car is an iron tray with metal trellised sides about nine inches high. It is just large enough for two passengers who lie huddled along the floor of the tray, with the boots of one close to the head of the other, and the iron hook from which the cage is hung just above them. As the rope sags a good deal the car gives occasional jolts and jumps which induce a tendency to cling tightly to the flimsy bulwark.

It is, however, safe enough with ordinary care, though there is an element of risk, as my friend the lieutenant tactfully explained. The wire-rope runs over a drum at each end of the course, and forms a double line of overhead railway, one car going up as the other comes down. If they are properly loaded so that one hangs well clear of the other, and there is not much wind, all is well. But on stormy days the cars are apt to sway, and sometimes come into collision as they pass ; and in that case the heavier of the two might knock the lighter clean off its overhead rail and send it spinning into the depths. For this reason

human traffic on the line is supposed to be suspended when the wind blows strongly.

A minor drawback is that the power of the motor which winds the hauling rope sometimes gives out, and the car is held up till it can be restored. This happened to us once and we hung for about ten minutes over a sheer drop of a thousand feet. My young friend cheered me by relating how he had been in a similar situation for two hours, till he was beginning to wonder whether they would leave him to die of hunger or send an aeroplane to his rescue. And of course a rope *might* break or the overhead runners side-slip, and then——!

Notwithstanding these possibilities the teleferic, when you get used to it, is rather a fascinating way of travel. Its smooth bird-like motion is pleasant, and it is exhilarating to be swung along in mid-air far above the heads of the tallest pines, with forests, watercourses, valleys, precipices, and fallen avalanches unrolling below you. As the wire-rope has to run unsupported between its terminal pulleys, the teleferic railway is made in short stretches. We had to alight and change carriages at about eight "stations" on our upward journey. By the time we had reached the third or fourth I was quite in love with the system, and came to the conclusion that if it could be made entirely safe and somewhat more comfortable it would be a far pleasanter mode of mountain locomotion



than the funicular and the cog-wheel railway, with their smoke, and noise, and friction.

The teleferics have made this war at high altitudes possible and even to a certain extent convenient. Ammunition, stores, material, mountain and field guns, have been brought up the aerial line ; it carries the daily food supplies and medical stores with regularity and despatch ; wounded men, too shattered to walk, are brought down reposing comfortably on rugs in the shallow cars. The teleferic is the vascular and nervous system of the whole organisation, linking all together from the distant base, where there are real railways and good roads, to the distant first-line post, where a few men keep ward above the clouds.

But these wires are too slight for heavy cannon. As you glide along you see sheer walls of rock and long perilous slopes up which, with rope, and lever, and human muscles, the big pieces were hoisted. You wonder how the thing could ever have been done. But done it was ; as you have audible and ocular evidence, for high above the highest of the teleferics you hear the boom of cannon, and you can see the smoke and flame issuing from some nest of jagged rock jutting through the snow field.

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We are well into the snows before we have done with the teleferics. Long since we have left behind

us green turf and Alpine flowers, the pines and firs and heather. At the last station but one we are in a bleak and lifeless solitude, where not even the mountain ferns will grow. But the solitude is peopled now, as it has never yet been in all its millenniums of insolent desolation. At this point, 2500 metres high, the Alpine Clubs had erected a "Rifugio," a good stone-built hut, where the climber, having spent the day in mounting from the valley, could pass the night before beginning the ascent of the snow-peaks.

The Rifugio has been turned into a sort of elevated goods station, a rail head for the teleferics, and a forwarding and collecting centre for the advanced posts higher up. Wooden shanties and sheds perch among the rocks; sacks and barrels and cases and many planks are heaped on the small platform of level ground in front of the house; hundreds of men are encamped about here, and they are all as busy as bees, hiving the stores that come from the distant warm world down below, and passing them on to that other world of emptiness and cold in front.

Pack mules can reach this point, and we saw them stringed out in long files as they threaded their surefooted way up the steep and narrow trails. Here they discharge their loads, which have to be repacked and distributed among porters who carry the burdens to their ultimate destination on



*Photo: "Central News."*

GUN ON THE WIRE-ROPE RAILWAY



their backs and shoulders, or drag them over the snow in sledges. These porters are mostly territorials, middle-aged, ill-kempt soldiers, in shabby uniforms, with not a shred of military swagger about them. They do not enjoy their job like the Alpini, or take pride in it like the smart mechanics of the Genio, the engineers; they grumble and grunt, and slouch along, with gloomy and reproachful eyes peering above their woollen mufflers. But they do their work all the same, they haul and carry and plough through the snow, with the steady inexhaustible patience of the Italian peasant-workman. Italy owes much to these sturdy stubborn fellows, who but for the war might be toiling in their own little vineyards or reaping the harvests of South America.

It was a hard life in the winter for the handful of officers marooned in the Rifugio, with the mountain paths blocked, so that they could not go down for weeks at a time, and the snow drifting above the windows. They saw nothing but snow and ice and rock all the time, and one of them told me that four months of this dazzling whiteness, this stern black, and iron-grey, so got upon his nerves that he shouted for joy when at last he was sent down and saw green trees and grass and running waters again.

Matters are easier now. The stone building is used as a store and warehouse; the officers live in wooden houses, well-warmed with petrol stoves,



and not uncomfortable. I lunched at one of their messes, and found my hosts genial, good-humoured, and conversational after the manner of officers in the Alpine regiments. A lieutenant came in muffled in fur cap and cape, his cheeks reddened by the thrashing mountain blast. He had been out since five that morning on skis running round the sentry posts and vedette stations on the higher levels. "It keeps the fellows awake," he said. "They get lonely up there and like to see someone occasionally."

I suspect that was partly the reason why at these elevated camps and billets I was myself so cordially welcomed. It was a change for these hermits to talk to somebody who had come out of that other plane of being where there are paved streets, and shops, and theatres, and women, a change even to see civilian garb again after the perpetual uniform. I spent a cheerful hour with them and would gladly have lingered longer. But the afternoon was wearing on, and my guide reminded me that we had to cross the glacier before darkness fell.

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Beyond the Rifugio the ground rises sharply to a great ridge from which the peaks stand out, with small depressions or passes between them. There was still another teleferic, newly laid, to carry us almost to the opening of one of these passages.

Through it we made our way on foot, and halted at the spot which till the end of the spring was the most advanced of the Italian outposts. Just behind us, and extending in a wide crescent on either hand, was the summit ridge, with its crests thrust skyward, in towers of blackness and horns of ivory. Opposite, some three miles away, was another and similar wall, similarly sentinelled by tall, upstanding peaks. Between the two lay the *vedretta*, the snow-covered glacier, a level white sheet, looking like the frozen river it is.

This ice-river marked the boundary between the Empire and the Kingdom, and all through the winter and spring it separated their troops. On the one bank, where I was standing, was the Italian outpost line ; on the other were the Austrians, guarding their own frontier. The *vedretta* lay between, too broad to be crossed by rifle bullets ; but adventurous patrols would sally out and encounter one another in mid channel, and there were fierce combats on the ice, and dead bodies left lying under the snow drifts or tumbled into the crevasses. Somewhere in one of these drifts a whole platoon lies buried, sleeping under that white shroud that will cover their bones till the mountains give up their dead.

Glacier-walking for the unaccustomed is toilsome work. " Let me look at your boots," said the lieutenant. I showed them, a stout pair, shod with

nails which I had deemed substantial. But the Alpino condemned them as inadequate, and called upon one of our escort to lace over them crampons, the spikiest and most formidable. Even with these aids, and an iron-pointed pole, my progress was not rapid over the frozen surface with its covering of snow, sometimes thin and slippery, sometimes loose, heavy, and clinging. The glacier, like other glaciers, is deceptive. When you look down upon it from above it seems smooth and even; a nearer acquaintance shows it to be crumpled and furrowed, and broken with little hillocks and hollows, and occasional deep cuts in the ice over which the snow lies treacherously.

All this makes slow and arduous travelling for the inexperienced. It took us three hours to accomplish the passage, and as I slipped and stumbled along I envied the transport parties which passed us, moving with easy, certain steps under their burdens, or harnessed like Esquimaux dogs to their sleighs, and keeping a good round pace all the time.

I was in a fit mood to appreciate the wondrous tale of the conquest of the glacier wherewith the lieutenant of the Alpini beguiled the way. His was first-hand testimony; for he had himself taken part in the expedition. It was at the end of May that the Italians, who had looked at their enemies across the ice-river for many months, resolved to

push forward. Four companies were allotted to the task; in this region the fighting is not done by army corps and divisions. They started from four different points at the edge of the *vedretta*, late on a moonless night, amid a snowfall and a shrieking wind. The darkness hung upon them like a pall, and swept in black delusive shadows over the gleaming surface of the ice-field. All landmarks were lost, and the columns steered by the luminous compass, counting their steps. Down the bank they stole, heavy laden with great-coats, rifles, ammunition, skis, a couple of machine-guns.

Very slowly and cautiously, under the bitter cold and the wild hurricane, they crawled across the glacier, crunching the snow softly under their boots, so as not to give premature warning to the Austrian sentries. And they were so far successful that they got nearly to the foot of the hostile ridge before the enemy made out their approach through the dim lights of the coming dawn.

Even so, I thought as I toiled painfully up that same ridge, it must have been an awkward place to assault for tired and burdened men, in the face of rifles and machine-guns. But the soldiers fixed bayonets and with their battle-cry of "Savoia," went forward at the charge. The Austrians, not waiting to cross steel, threw up their hands and surrendered as the Alpini topped the bank. One body, I was told,

after giving the token of submission, shot at their opponents as they came up and were bayoneted in stern retribution for their treacherous folly.

That was a matter of some eight weeks before my visit, and in the interval the Italians had established themselves in this advanced position just beyond the old frontier. The Austrians had fallen back and were well away in front of them on somewhat lower ground, for here the boundary rampart is at its highest. The little post for half a company of men and half a dozen officers is so buried in snow and rock that you are close upon it before you know that it is there. It has not been able to make a clearing for itself in the wilderness like the Rifugio Camp lower down. You are over your knees in snow in walking from one shanty to another ; you lose all trace of the tiny settlement if you move a hundred yards away in any direction.

But the occupants are proud of their abode, and enlarge upon its amenities, pointing out with complacency that this is no case of burrows and dug-outs and caverns, but an affair of honest wood building, with partitioned cubicles to sleep in for anybody above the rank of sub-lieutenant, and doors, positively doors with hinges, to some of them. It was said that the colonel, when he paid a visit to the post and slept in one of these commodious apartments, hinted darkly at the thirst for luxury which was undermining the





*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

ALPINI ON ADAMELLO



spirit of his young men. Undoubtedly it is a great achievement to have made the camp at all at this spot ; for every plank of wood, every iron pipe and nail, every shred of canvas roofing, has had to be brought by wire-rope or mule-back, and by manual haulage, from the valley 7000 feet below.

It is a rough little place but sound and strong. The officers' hut with its bare wooden walls, deal seats, and trestle tables, does not suggest luxury, but it serves its purpose. There is a small cook-house at one end, with a petrol stove wherewith a soldier-cook, one of those accomplished culinary artists to be found in every Italian platoon, turned us out a quite sufficient dinner. There was soup, with other things, wine, coffee. As we sat round the board, and smoked our cigarettes by the light of candles (petrol is too valuable up here to be used as an illumination) and chatted, while the cloud-wreaths drifted past the tiny square of window, and the night-wind raved and clamoured outside, I felt warm and snug, and drank deep draughts of what R. L. Stevenson calls the pleasure of shelter.

And there were other pleasures. Somebody looked at his watch. "The postman will be here directly," he said ; and presently the postman came. Every evening does that invaluable official travel up by the teleferic and then tramp across the glacier bringing his budget for this camp and its out-stations. He carries letters, post-cards,

presents from wives, sisters, sweethearts ; he brings above all newspapers. In a few minutes we were deep in the *Corriere* and the *Secolo* of that same morning, we had before us the official bulletins from all the fronts, we knew that the Russians had netted another big catch of prisoners, that the British advance was pushing splendidly on, that more hill-positions were being captured in the Trentino, we read Cadorna's reports, Joffre's, Sir Douglas Haig's, just as people had been doing in Paris and London only a few hours before. We even had our evening paper ; for the colonel kindly called us up by telephone, and read us out the latest official despatch, the one issued at five o'clock that afternoon and circulated from General Headquarters by telegraph. Here we were really ahead of the great world ; for only at its breakfast table the next morning would the general public learn the contents of that message.

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So there are worse places than the Glacier Camp ; much worse places, said the officer who had shown me his winter-quarters in the snow-bank. And there are worse places even than *that*. Another officer took me to where he had been in charge of an observation-post for some time in the winter. It was high up above the station, on a saw-backed bit of slope, so steep and spiny that the snow would

hardly lie on it. Here they raked together a sort of cairn among the rocks and kept watch for a fortnight. Their food was tinned cold meat, for they could not light a fire ; and at night they could not sleep since they had to move about to keep themselves from being frozen to death. There are still sentries out on such stations. In some of the worst posts these men are relieved every half-hour, and a spirit-stove of alcohol is kept burning to put life into them with a hot drink of cocoa or coffee when they come into the guard-room, chilled and stiff after even that short vigil.

The soldiers have a wooden barrack, a low shed with a domed timber roof, with bunks in tiers along the walls, and a narrow passage down the middle. I found it warm enough, but very close, dark, and stuffy, not unclean all things considered, though pervaded by "an ancient and fish-like odour" ; which is not to be wondered at seeing that it is dormitory, kitchen, *salle-à-manger*, and smoking-room for its tenants, who are packed together here by day and night, and come in streaming with perspiration or drenched by rain and mist.

There is no window in the place, for warmth is more prized than ventilation, and no artificial light ; and in the cold and wind one does nothing that is not absolutely essential out of doors. So when the men come off duty they make for this obscure



retreat, and snuggle into their berths with all their clothes on, except their overcoats and boots. They are here for three weeks or a month, and during the whole time they do not wash or shave or get a complete change of clothing.

The officers are a little better off, but it is a hard life for them also, in spite of the alleviations mentioned. Fresh water is too precious to be used for the toilet, and melted snow is bad for the skin. Anything will do for uniform, provided it is warm and weatherproof, and the only point of importance is to have good boots and plenty of stockings and thick overcoats and mufflers. Officers are shaggy and unshorn like their men. They are too hard at work for the study of appearances, even if there were facilities for that pursuit. When their spell of duty here is over they go back to billets or the reserve camps, and get out their civilised garments and bathe and shave and become smart, once more. Yet both officers and men are said to be healthy, and they were in excellent spirits. The keen, cold air, the hard exercise, the perpetual tension of the artillery duel which never ceases, the greater excitement of preparing an attack or waiting for one, keep them in prime condition, fit and well.



Photo: "Central News."

A FATIGUE PARTY



A long day under the mountain breeze makes sleep welcome. After we had finished our dinner and talk, and walked out a little in the moonlight, I went to bed in the private chamber assigned to me, one of the cubicles with doors. The bed was a wooden bunk ; and if there were no blankets and sheets, there was that most excellent substitute for them, a sleeping-bag lined with sheepskin. I took off outer garments, and plunged into this fleecy receptacle, and lay warm and comfortable, till slumber gripped me with an imperative hand, and I slept like all the rest in the sleeping camp, except the sentries, vigilant with fixed bayonet, looking out across the darkness towards Austria and the enemy.

But it was shivery work to get up in the cold darkness of the dawn, to pull on sodden boots and leggings, and to sally forth upon the snow frozen crisp and hard during the night. The wind had risen and was blowing in fierce gusts, so that the return passage across the glacier was uncomfortable. Indeed the storm was so violent that several of the teleferics were declared dangerous for passengers, and we had to make a good part of the descent on foot. Going down is easier than coming up ; but as we dropped through the mountain paths, and then gradually, by ferny copses, and deep winding glens, to the lakes where the mules awaited us, I saw how long the way really was, and admired

afresh the forethought, industry, and determination which had so shortened it that all this lofty tract of barren land could be brought within the sphere of military operations.

It would have been worth a much more fatiguing journey, and a much less interesting one, to gain a perception of the manner in which resolute will and clear-sighted intelligence had triumphed over physical obstacles that might have seemed insuperable. The war, in many of its phases, has brought that lesson home. It has set forward the limits of human endeavour ; it has revealed unexpected depths of courage, capacity, endurance, resourcefulness, in the men of many nations. And in that revelation Italy has had her share. If she has been spared the greater sacrifices of her Allies she has at any rate shown that she, too, is capable of strenuous exertion and high endeavour, that she can carry through a difficult and perilous task with cool forethought and daring energy, that she can rely upon the patriotic ardour of her citizen-soldiers, and the scientific skill and organising ability of their leaders. The more closely this Italian campaign of the high mountains is examined the more remarkable it appears, and the more creditable to those who have taken part in it.



## CHAPTER XI

### IMPRESSIONS OF THE ITALIAN ARMY

ITALY AND THE WAR SPIRIT—NO MILITARISM—AN UNOBTRUSIVE ARMY—ABSENCE OF SHOW AND SWAGGER—A QUIET GENERAL STAFF—PLAIN-LIVING AND HARD WORK—THE WELL-FED RANK AND FILE—GOOD CLOTHES AND CLEANLINESS—ECONOMICAL AND EFFICIENT ADMINISTRATION—THE ARMY MEDICAL SERVICE—THE ITALIAN SOLDIER A GOOD PATIENT—A MODEL HOSPITAL—POETRY AND PAINTING IN THE FIELD—“NAVY AND HOUSEMAID”

THE Italians are a brave and spirited people, and during the past hundred years they have done their share of fighting; but they have not been accustomed to consider themselves a military nation. That is to say, they, like ourselves, look upon war as a disagreeable expedient only to be adopted when national honour and interests can be vindicated in no other way; and they do not in the least accept it, like some of its recent Teutonic admirers, as a “biological necessity,” or as a divinely ordered medicine for the ills of humanity. They think more highly of the artist, the scholar, the poet, and the scientist than they do of the

soldier, though they admit that his trade is honourable and useful.

For the past quarter of a century they have been absorbed, despite their African adventures, in the works of peace. The country has been passing through a period of economic reconstruction, and the energies of many of its most capable citizens have been devoted to commercial, industrial, and scientific pursuits. The Triple Alliance, supported by very powerful political groups, was regarded with no enthusiasm,<sup>1</sup> but it seemed at least to offer sufficient security against international dangers, and it was thought that Italy was under no immediate obligation to develop her warlike resources to their highest potential capacity. Her most influential statesmen had allotted only a minor share of their attention in recent years to problems of strategy and military organisation, expenditure on the national defences had been rigidly controlled, and the deficiencies revealed in the Tripoli campaign, or caused by that enterprise, had not been made good. When the storm burst in 1914 there was no nation in Europe—not excepting our own—which was less prepared for a great war or less desirous of it. Militarism is the last offence of which Italy can be fairly accused.

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<sup>1</sup> See *infra*, chaps. XIII and XIV.

There is not much of the pomp and circumstance of glorious war in any modern military force when it is embodied for the field. But of such qualities there is less in the Italian army than in almost any other with which I am acquainted. It is the quietest, the most unostentatious, the least swaggering, of warlike services. In this and in other ways it is characteristic of a nation whose instincts are essentially democratic.

The Italians have never, at least in modern times, had a military caste, and they do not want one. They adopted national service as a matter of necessity, and they are reconciled to its incidents and burdens. But their attitude towards the soldier is that he is just an ordinary citizen engaged in performing indispensable duties for the state. He deserves proper treatment in peace, and all possible attention and consideration in time of war. The Italians are proud of their army as they are proud of their communal savings banks and their technical schools. It is a creditable national institution. But it does not inspire the kind of mystic adoration which it arouses in Germany, or even the romantic enthusiasm which gathers about it in France and other countries. To fuss over a sub-lieutenant would seem as absurd to most Italians as it would be in England to make an idol of the policeman.

I suppose this is the reason why Italian soldiers,

even in war, do not give themselves airs. Officers and rank and file are unobtrusive and self-effacing. It is hard for the man in uniform not to exhibit, or at any rate to feel in his heart, a certain pitying contempt for the male civilian. If there is any such sentiment in the Italian army it is so carefully repressed that one doubts whether it exists. The soldier is not encouraged to cut himself off from the rest of the community by accentuating differences in speech, manner, bearing, and habits. In Germany the moment a recruit puts on his uniform he belongs to a nation within a nation. He is expected, and indeed required, to talk, walk, and act in a distinctive fashion. There is a military dialect, staccato and laconic, which is not the language of ordinary life. But Antonio or Giuseppe with the colours behaves much the same as other folks except when actually engaged upon his military duties.

Service uniforms are not decorative anywhere. The Italian is one of the least decorative of any. Officers and men are clothed in a dress of plain stout serviceable greenish drab. The Alpini still keep their jaunty mountain hats sometimes adorned with an eagle's feather, and the Bersaglieri have their dashing black plumes. Otherwise there are hardly any distinctions between the various regiments and arms of the service, except for modest little badges on cap and collar. For the

trenches a helmet has been adopted, very like the French, well modelled and dignified. The alternative headgear is a soft peaked little cap. For leg covering there are drab putties, which were introduced some three or four years ago, and are worn by infantry, cavalry, artillery, engineers, and train. They are not always rolled in a manner that would be accepted by a sergeant-major in a British regiment, and the wearers do not seem very comfortable in them. I doubt whether they will survive the present war except for the mountain troops. Already the high boot, lacing over the trousers, is coming in, and the soldiers, I am told, like it better.

On the march some of the Italian regiments can cover the ground at a very fair pace; and the Alpine companies will breast the steepest acclivities at the double and have wind enough left in them for a bayonet fight at the top. That was how they got possession of Monte Magari, on the Asiago plateau. The Austrian commander had spread his force along the sloping side of the mountain, thinking the main attack would be made there, and left only a weak guard to defend the other, and as it seemed inaccessible, face. But the Alpini took the precipices with a run, made short work of the small detachment of infantry at the summit, and tumbled in among the surprised artillerymen before they had realised that they were in danger from



this quarter. A whole battery was captured by a frontal attack of infantry, which is a thing that happens very rarely indeed in this war.

When off duty, however, the soldier conserves his forces. He does not waste his energy by walking fast in hot weather, but moves with a slow dragging step, and with small regard for that squareness of back and shoulder, wherein drill-instructors delight. As he lounges along the street, with his little grey cap, his loosely cut grey jacket, his knickerbocker legs, he might be mistaken for a bicyclist shop-assistant out for a Sunday holiday.

The Italian officer before the war was often a rather dressy warrior. Now his attire is so like that of his men that you wonder how the latter can pick him out quickly enough to render the salute which is given and acknowledged with punctilious formality. His uniform is precisely of the same cut, and apparently of the same material, as that of the rank and file. Compared with him the French officer, in his pretty service suit of sky blue with laced cap, or the English, with his sword-belts and brown leggings, is ornamental.

The Italian officers, in the war-zone, wear no belts when off duty; often they wear no shoulder-straps with rank badges, and they too invest their legs for the most part in putties, sometimes even in stockings. Faint reminiscences of the older tradition

still cling to the younger cavalry officers, as they stride along, booted and spurred, with immaculate figures that suggest artificial aid to the inquiring eye. First-rate horsemen and the keenest of soldiers are these cavaliers, and dearly would they love to "take on" the Hungarian hussars in a fair field if modern strategy would give the white arm a chance. As it is some of them are doing infantry work, and doing it with the conscientious industry of their colleagues.

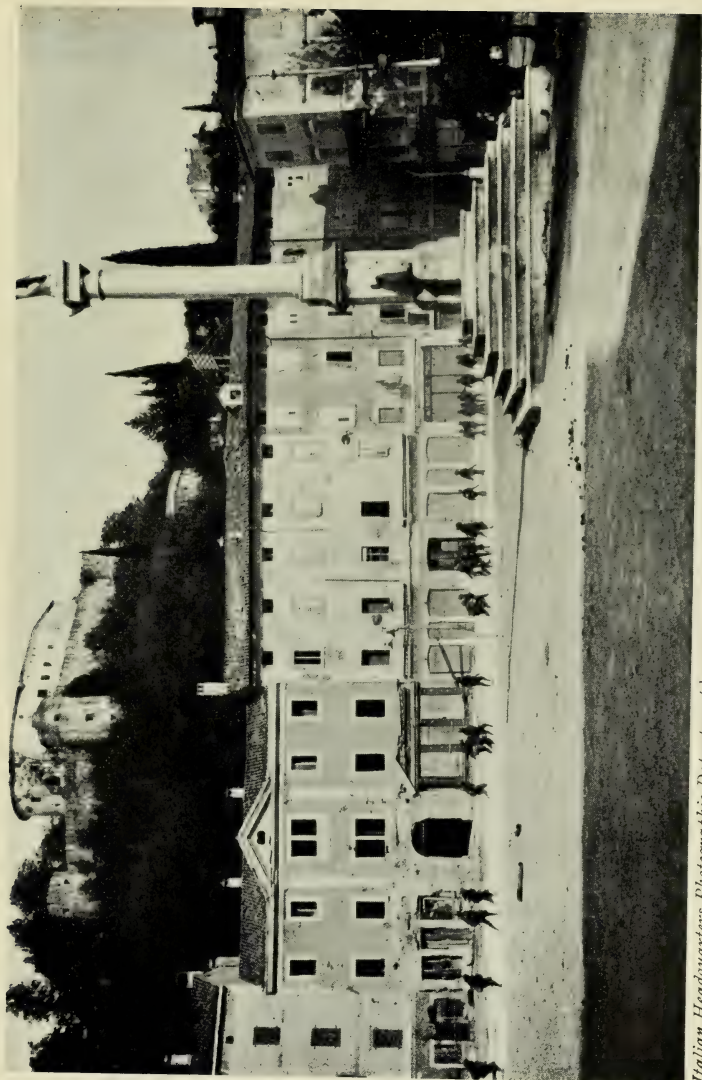
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It is a business-like, hard-working army. Everybody is closely occupied, and the hours of duty are long. This applies to the General Staff as well as to all the rest. General Staffs at the fronts are retiring in their habits. They do not, for obvious reasons, unduly advertise their presence. But on this front self-effacement is carried further than in most others. I am under the impression that the great majority of the inhabitants of the place where the Comando Supremo is located could not take you to its offices; I fancy that a good many do not even know that they are entertaining such distinguished visitors.

There are no "brass hats" in the Italian General Staff, there is no picnic element. The staff-officer wears much the same garb as his regimental comrades, and moves about in similar

unostentatious fashion. There is not that constant dashing to and fro in motor-cars which one is accustomed to associate with life at headquarters, general and other. The Comando Supremo can have all the automobiles it wants, for every car in Italy is at its disposal when and if required. But it discourages their unnecessary use. Officers, even very high officers, are not too proud to go from one bureau to another on foot, instead of keeping a car, a chauffeur, and a mechanic hanging about all day to save a ten-minutes' walk. For any military duty, where a car is really requisite, a well-appointed fast vehicle is always to be had. But the officers are instructed that whenever they can travel by railway, without detriment to the interest of the service, they should do so. For the trains are running in any case (they continue to run with astonishing regularity right into the war zone), whereas cars use petrol and petrol costs money. And Italy does not mean to spend more money than it can help over this very expensive campaign.

Life at headquarters in the Italian army—and for that matter in every other army—is arduous and rather dull. The most important personages are in their offices at seven or eight in the morning, and you will find them there at eight in the evening or later, Sundays as well as week-days. An occasional very early canter, an hour with



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.*

ITALIAN INFANTRY IN THE PIAZZA GRANDE, GORIZIA





friends at the café after dinner, are about their only relaxations. There are no games or sports for the officers, nor, I think, for the men. The only game that is afoot just now is the great game of war, and they are all anxious to get on with that without distraction, and then go back to the occupations and avocations they had to leave when the country called upon them ; for, of course, the larger proportion of the officers are not professional soldiers but civilians, with other interests in normal times than those of the army.

Now their sole interest is the campaign, and they are absorbed in it. Some of them have not seen their families for many months, though they could reach them by rail in a few hours. There are no week-end trips home, the home which may be so near, no occasional spells of furlough. Officers in the war-zone are entitled to fifteen days' leave in a year, and that is all that any of them has taken, from General Cadorna downwards.

They live simply and plainly. If you dine at a mess, even of high staff-officers, with men among them who bear famous names and historic titles, you will be hospitably and sufficiently entertained but with no undue luxury. You will probably note that about half the company are drinking no wine, and that the other half do not smoke. They tell you that alcohol and tobacco interfere with the alertness of body and clearness of thought

demanding in active service. No doubt they are right. But when you know what his bottle of *bianco* or *rosso*, and his cigarette, mean to most Italians of the well-to-do classes you realise that these men have mastered one of the prime lessons of the craft of war : they have learnt how to make a sacrifice.

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The economy with which the Italian campaign is being conducted is not attained, so far as one can judge, at the expense of efficiency. There is a stern objection to wasteful expenditure, and all the costly and superfluous trimmings of an army are ruthlessly cut down. But everything that is necessary to keep the soldier in good health and condition, everything that adds to the effectiveness of the great machine, is supplied with an ungrudging hand.

The soldier is very well looked after. I doubt whether there is a better-fed fighting man on any of the fronts. Our own may get more solid food, as well as tea, jam, and other things which the Italian soldier does not want. The daily ration of the private in khaki may weigh some ounces heavier than that supplied to the man in grey, but it is not more nourishing nor wholesome. The Italian of the working classes is a very moderate eater in the ordinary way ; it is more than

probable that the majority of the peasants and labourers now in the ranks have never in their lives been so well fed. They obtain every day a sufficient allowance of meat, bread, flour, coffee, vegetables, and with that they enjoy wholesome and appetising meals. They also receive daily a draught of light red or white wine, which is the national drink of the country. It provides the soldier with the mild stimulant to which he is accustomed, and renders it unnecessary for him to spend his *soldi* in the village taverns. On the contrary, I am told that he is even saving out of his pay, having everything he needs, down to a few cigarettes, provided by the Government, so that he is often able to send something weekly to his wife, who is working away, as these Italian women work, to keep the family farm or the little family shop in going order.

The quality of the food is excellent. One day I went out to look at one of the gun positions just behind the trenches. It was near a very remote and sequestered hill village in which the battery commander and his staff had their quarters. Our inspection finished, the colonel invited us to lunch with himself and his officers at their mess, which was in the little village school-house. We had a most satisfying repast, soup, meat, macaroni, fruit, coffee, everything of the best. I was the more surprised at this menu when I was informed that it was mainly composed of the army rations.

The meat, coffee, and bread—admirable bread it is, of unbleached wheaten flour—were the same as supplied to the soldiers. They could have almost as good a meal themselves every day if they chose. “Not quite so well cooked?” I suggested. “Quite as well,” said the colonel; “perhaps better. Our fellows are capital cooks and rather particular in their taste. They will go hunting about the cottage gardens for the herbs which give the right flavouring to their soup.”

The clothing and appointments are also good. There is little outward show; but the things bought for military use if plain are of excellent quality and cannot be cheap. Officers and men wear service uniform of the same cloth, and very sound, strong cloth—much of it comes from English looms—it is. The same may be said of the soldiers’ boots, blankets, and equipment. In the base camps and temporary barracks they sleep in iron bedsteads with canvas hammock mattresses. The bedstead is a framework of posts and rods, which takes to pieces for transportation, and the hammocks are hung in two or three tiers. This arrangement has superseded the wooden plank bed laid on the floor: it costs more but it is healthier and more comfortable, and it saves space.

No barracks could be kept cleaner. In this respect the Italian Army is well up to our own standard and possibly above that of the French.

The men are required to take scrupulous care of their belongings and their persons. There is nothing of the *poilu* about the Italian ranker, who has not been encouraged to think that hairiness and untidiness are among the martial virtues. They cut their hair short, shave clean, and wash.

Going over the barracks of an infantry battalion I asked the major to let me see a private's kit. The officer turned to the man by whose cot we were standing and ordered him to exhibit his property. The soldier took down his knapsack, great-coat, belts, etc., rolled in a neat bundle on his bed, and produced everything for our inspection. Nothing could have been in better order. There was a spare grey cotton shirt, thin slippers, brush, comb, razor, soap, cooking tin, a canned emergency ration, socks, and long strips of linen rag to enwrap the feet for marching, all spotlessly clean. The belts are of rather rough leather, not pretty but strong. The boots are stout and serviceable; the bayonet a long, business-like looking weapon; and generally the soldier seems well found in everything required to enable him to live in reasonable comfort and perform his duties.

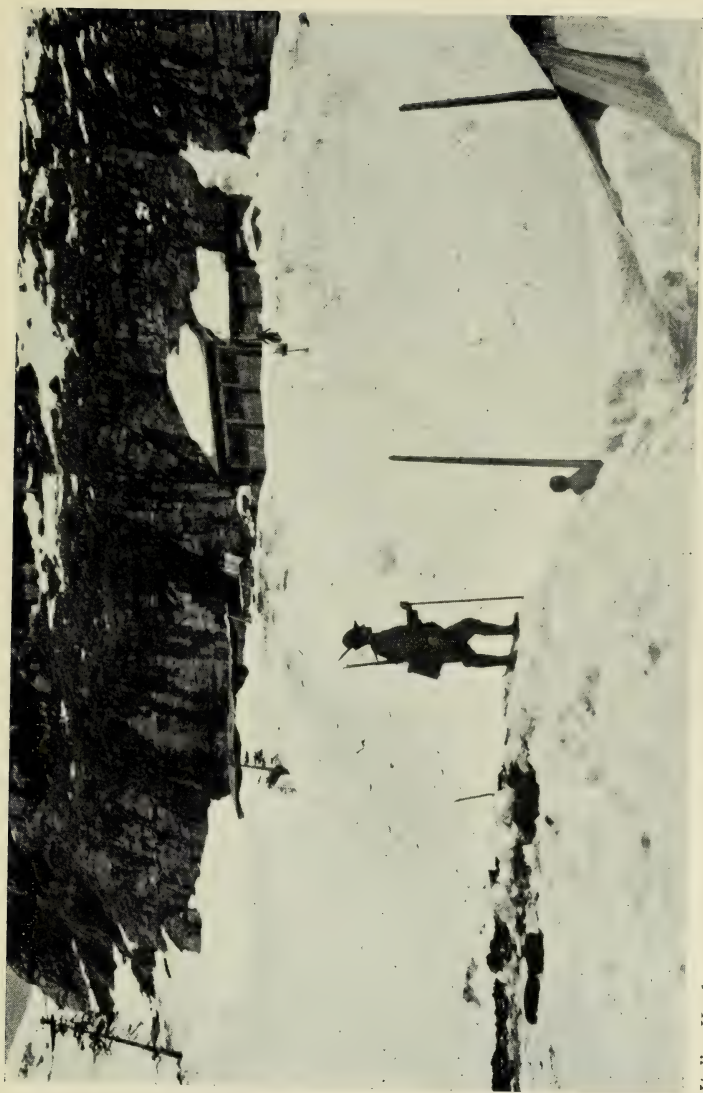
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The Italian Army Medical Service, the *Corpo Sanitario*, like most of the others, was not organised on a scale to cope with the exigencies of such a war



as this. The International Red Cross has furnished a strong contingent, and the Italian Army is gratefully appreciative of the services rendered by Mr. Trevelyan's admirable hospital unit, and the other British ambulances. For the rest the Corpo Sanitario, with its nucleus of exceedingly well trained officers, found itself compelled to draw freely upon the civilian resources of the country. The general practitioner of the Italian villages and provincial towns, a hardworking and earnest professional man as a rule, is a medical officer in the field and base hospitals, with keen young students to assist him, and the most eminent members of the faculty to supervise his proceedings. The duty of tending the sick and wounded is simplified by the habits of the people. The Italian labourer can be content with a very moderate allowance of "medical comforts," of which he gets a most minute quantity when he falls ill in his own house.

He makes a good patient, and receives all needful attention, though he is less luxuriously cared for than Mr. Thomas Atkins when disabled. Hardy, contented, and enduring, the invalid Italian soldier can lie quietly in his bed all day, and is neither bored nor irritable if he is not provided with visitors, cigarettes, and books to while away the long hours. There is, however, an excellent voluntary committee, conducted by ladies and gentlemen of the Lombard aristocracy, which



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

A MOUNTAIN POST



collects books and magazines for the field hospitals. Also in many towns there are wooden boxes, with wide slits, at the street corners, wherein one is invited to deposit newspapers for the wounded.

I am told that at the beginning of the war some of the hospitals found themselves overwhelmed by the sudden influx of patients, and they had to make such improvised rough-and-ready arrangements as they could. Trained nurses were scarce, but the nuns and sisters of the religious orders rose to the occasion, and noble work they have done for the sick and injured in their quiet, undemonstrative fashion.

Whatever may have been the case at first, the great base hospitals of the *Corpo Sanitario* are now magnificent establishments. I saw one which is capable of receiving over three thousand patients, so that when full, with its staff, nurses, and orderlies, it will house some five thousand persons—a little town in itself. Its buildings had formerly been the barracks, riding-school, and stables of a cavalry regiment, and in some of the whitewashed wards you could still see the mangers out of which the horses had fed and the rings to which they were tethered.

These buildings had been converted into excellent hospital rooms, large, light, and airy; and all the appurtenances, the X-ray apparatus, bacteriological laboratories, operating chambers,

and disinfecting plant, were up to the very latest level of modern medical science. Over them at least no expense had been spared. There is no finer hospital, on so large a scale, in any of the war-theatres. If it had a fault it struck me that it was too cold, precise, formal, rigidly perfect, without the touch of homeliness which our cheery Red Cross girls and brisk young army doctors contrive to impart to our own establishments. But, at any rate, these Italian military surgeons, some of them of the regular service, others called up for the war from their practices, were full of professional zeal, and radiating with intelligence.

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It is indeed an intelligent army in all its sections, the army of a people which has some claim to call itself the most intellectual, as well as the most artistic, in Europe. The artistic quality comes out everywhere and in unexpected places. In an officers' mess I visited in one of the new barracks behind the lines I found the bare timber walls and ceilings covered with pictures, little "bits" from the camp and the trenches, and clever caricatures of the enemy, and of Italy's special butt, the old Austrian Emperor. A couple of young artists, serving in the ranks of the battalion, had done these things in their leisure time.



The men's own sleeping rooms are sometimes similarly ornamented, and even the outside of the huts will be decorated with conventional designs and arabesques or patriotic inscriptions. There is always somebody in an Italian battalion who can paint, and generally somebody who can write poetry. If Kipling were an Italian writer his verses would be recited round every camp-fire, as D'Annunzio's are. In the Isonzo region there is an unusually commodious observation post burrowed out of the earth. It is disused now; but at the time of the great advance eastward it was the office and directing station of an Army Commander, so that its rooms were walled and floored and furnished with hinged doors. These things one has seen elsewhere; but not the lines from patriotic poets painted in letters embellished with scrolls and flourishes all round the plank walls. There was one much-quoted sentence by D'Annunzio: "May every blow find its mark, every citizen be a warrior, every warrior a hero."

The Italian soldier likes adorning his quarters, pulling them about, altering them, and generally working at, and on, them. It is his favourite amusement, and his substitute for the games and recreations which help to pass the time in other armies. Even in the trenches he is always busy, reconstructing, consolidating, making improvements, inventing fresh ingenious contrivances for

his own comfort and the deception of the enemy.

There is a lot of this kind of work to be done in all trenches and it is not usually popular. "I thought I was to be a soldier," grumbled a disgusted British linesman, "not a blooming combination of a navy and a housemaid." The combination does not hurt the feelings of the Italian ranker. He is a good navy, a good housemaid; he likes digging, and building, and cleaning up, and arranging and moving things. And he carries his handy and domesticated habits right up to the battle-field, and keeps himself bright and active and cheerful by their aid.

The officers take much interest in these occupations of their men. The service discipline is strict, and military offences are severely punished. But the social line between the commissioned and non-commissioned grades is not drawn so rigidly as in some other armies. There is a good deal of the *camaraderie* between officers and men which prevails in the French service; and though the formalities are duly observed the private finds it possible to talk to a lieutenant in a natural tone, and the captain does not behave to a corporal as if he belonged to a different variety of the human species. But then it is an army where, even in peace time, it may happen that the corporal is the son of a duke or a millionaire and the captain a country lawyer or a bank manager in a provincial town.





*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

GORIZIA: CARABINIERI QUESTIONING INHABITANTS, AUG. 9TH, 1916

## CHAPTER XII

### TRANSPORT AND MUNITIONS

ITALY'S DIFFICULTY—UNPREPAREDNESS—INADEQUATE RESOURCES—THE MOBILISATION OF INDUSTRY—THE TRANSPORT PROBLEM : RAILWAYS AND ROADS—THE FIAT COMPANY OF TURIN—THE ANSALDO WORKS NEAR GENOA—AN IMPRESSION OF OVERPOWERING ENERGY—HOME INDUSTRY : A VISIT TO A SMALL CRAFTSMAN.

ITALY, like the other Powers of the Anglo-Latin-Slav Alliance, was in no condition for war on the modern Titanic scale, when the European conflict began. Like the rest she had not in the least understood—or at least her statesmen and governing administrators had not understood—that the war would be mainly one of machinery and heavy guns. Like the rest of us she was more or less obsessed by the old traditions. She knew that her troops were brave, and she believed they would be well led. Just as Britain and France supposed that the *élan* and courage of their men, and the spirit of their officers, would prevail against the harsh discipline and lavish equipment of the Germans, so Italians hoped that their



patriotism and determination would overcome the motley hordes of the Hapsburg Monarchy, driven into battle by leaders they distrusted, for a cause many of them disliked.

In all these calculations the importance of the material element, munitions, guns, mechanical transport, immense supplies of projectiles, was underestimated if not ignored.

The secret of the Austro-German preparations had been well kept. None of the Allied General Staffs seems to have been aware how large a part in infantry tactics would be played by machine-guns, or how inadequately, in comparison with their enemies, they were furnished with these formidable weapons. None of them knew that the Germans and their partners intended to supplement, and largely supersede, the mobile artillery of the field by long-range ordnance of the heaviest calibres, and that the pieces hitherto regarded as "siege guns" and fortress guns would be the determining factor in every battle. And none knew—perhaps the Germans themselves did not know—how gigantic would be the consumption of shrapnel and high explosive shells, and how the whole industrial resources of the greatest nations would be taxed by the devouring greed of the batteries.

When the time came to make up the deficiencies the situation of Italy was in some respects worse

than that of the other chief members of the Entente group. She had allowed her military establishment to fall as far below the requisite level, judged by the new standard which the Central Alliance had set, as Britain, even though, unlike Britain, she had the system of national service in good working order. But her statesmen, intent upon internal politics and the rivalries of peace, hypnotised, some of them, by the Teuton magic, had never found time to master the elements of modern military science. The arsenals were unequal to a sudden and much increased demand; heavy guns, and machine-guns, and even rifles were utterly insufficient; there were no large reserves of explosives and projectiles. The organisation of all the supply services was antiquated and imperfect. In August, 1914, Italy would have had little to oppose to the well-equipped legions of her enemy except plenty of willing hearts, strong arms, and energetic brains.

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Fortunately she was not called upon to plunge into war, like England, at a few days' notice. She allowed herself a breathing space of nearly ten months, and those months were well used. But her disadvantages were numerous and severe. Britain, after all, was the first industrial community of the world, with almost unlimited pro-

ductive resources, that required to be directed rather than enlarged in order to supply the needs of the armies.

Italy was in a very different position. Her industries had been rapidly increasing during the previous three decades, but she was still not in the front rank, or even barely in the second rank, of the great manufacturing nations. In metallic and mechanical production in particular she stood far below Great Britain, the United States, Germany, France, and even Russia and Belgium. Busy and active as were the Milanese, Turin, and the Genoese Riviera, there was no Italian "black country," no such tracts seamed with mines, and scarred with foundries and blast furnaces, as Lancashire, Westphalia, the Sarr Valley, or the occupied districts of North-Eastern France and Western Russia.

Of coal Italy had next to none; of iron and steel very little; she had fine workshops and factories but not too many of them.

For her machinery and hardware generally, she had been largely dependent on Germany. Her engineers are of the best, in some branches of metal work like electric welding and iron casting she has no superiors, her artisans, mechanics are as skilful, laborious, and persevering as any in the world. But her industrial army was still weak and it was cantoned in small portions of the Peninsula.

It was necessary both to extend and to mobilise industry for war purposes. This task, after the first period of indecision and dissension had gone by, has been pursued in Italy with a quiet intensity that has borne amazing results. Like all the Latin countries Italy has suffered from over-centralisation and the excessive power of a bureaucratic hierarchy. Where "the State" does much it is always easier for the State to do more. The Italian administrators, when they set to work in earnest to concentrate national activities on the one indispensable object, did not find themselves brought up at every turn by an inherited distrust of governmental action and a rooted individualism. There was no trouble in Italy about labour dilution, longer hours, or the control and diversion of output. That the Government, in the greatest of all emergencies, should dispose of every man's activity and deal at its will with his property did not seem unreasonable to people, trained to obedience by administrative autocracy, and by the conscription.

The Italian authorities had been given leisure to see what was being done in England and France. They watched the experiments carefully and profited by them. They constituted a Ministry—though it is only called an Under-Secretariate—of Munitions, and they found in General Dall'Olio an administrator of genius whose work, done under the able supervision of General Porro, may



be compared with that of Mr. Lloyd George and M. Albert Thomas. As in the other allied countries it was found desirable to carry out the provision of war material under local direction. In every district commissions were appointed to co-ordinate the industries and increase the output. Swiftly and smoothly the whole nation was organised for its new functions, and its productive capacity, in the special lines demanded, increased by leaps and bounds.

It was not merely in the industrial north that this energy was manifested. The mobilisation covered all Italy, and extended to Calabria, Sicily, Apulia, and other provinces, where they had been content to grow silkworms, and export wine and olive-oil, and emigrants. The emigrants stayed at home, and if they were not called up to the regiments they went to the munition factories which sprang up by hundreds throughout the country.

There was little friction over exemption and no tribunals were necessary. Employers were permitted to retain a certain number of their able-bodied workmen, on the condition that they should be kept to war work and the execution of government orders. Training-schools were opened for the instruction of the unskilled labourers, of whom Italy possesses an ampler reservoir than most countries, in the use of machinery and mechanical tools.

If the young fellows were wanted for the fight-



ing line the older men were available. One saw them everywhere in the factories, and on the road and field works, grizzled veterans in their forties, and fifties, and even sixties, handling saw and drill, pickaxe and shovel, with something of the ardour, and more than the persistence, of untamed youth.

All the belligerent nations have had to call upon women to do men's work, and nobly have the women responded. In Italy the summons was issued with reluctance and hesitation. The Italians have retained the Southern and Oriental idea about woman: her place is the home. True the *contadina* works on the land, and helps to gather in the crops and tend the goats; but that does not violate the rule because, to the Italian peasant, the home includes the farm and the byre. The segregation of women by the hundred in mills and factories is a novelty in Italy which runs counter to much popular feeling and popular prejudice.

I told an accomplished and open-minded Italian officer of my acquaintance about our girl-typists, and our female bank clerks, mechanics, porters, club attendants, our chauffeuses, lift-girls, post-women, and so forth, and expressed some surprise at seeing so little dilution of male labour in Italy in these and other occupations. He answered rather tartly: "We are a nation of large families, and we think that women have quite enough to do in looking after their children and their households."

Nevertheless, the prejudice has bent before the pressure of the national exigency. Many women have answered the summons to help the country in its hour of need, and I was told that at least fifty thousand would be found in the munition factories before the summer of 1916 was over.

Raw material and plant were a more serious difficulty than labour. The German and Austrian supplies of iron ore, steel, and machinery were cut off. Machine tools were scarce and the most indispensable requisite for them, tungsten, was almost a monopoly of the British Empire. On this point and some others, there was a certain amount of friction between the two countries, which it needed all the invaluable tact and excellent judgment of Sir Rennell Rodd to smooth away. Steam-power was costly to raise, with coal from Cardiff at £6 and £7 a ton; and loud and bitter were the complaints I heard everywhere on this score. Matters were made easier after Mr. Runciman's visit to Italy. But there is a great warning for the future in what has happened. Italy needs cheap coal and plenty of it; and she looks to Great Britain and the British Government to arrange that she gets it, not only during the war, but after the war is over.

But if Italy is short of coal she has plenty of water; and wonderful work has been accomplished in the utilisation of the mountain streams

and waterfalls for generating electric-power, which is superseding steam, and will render Italy in the future far less dependent on imported fuel to feed her factories.

By these and other means, and it may be added with the help of substantial contributions from the United Kingdom, France, and America, the shortage of munitions and weapons, which hampered Cadorna's operations in the earlier stages of the war, has been made good, and in the attack on Gorizia the Austrian batteries were smothered by the Italian rain of fire. It is said<sup>1</sup> that Italy can now turn out as many cannon in a month as she formerly produced in a year, that her output of projectiles of all types is thirty times greater, and her production of rifles two hundred times greater than it was at the outbreak of hostilities. And she has given, as well as received, aid. She has supplied Russia, France, and even Great Britain with some valuable and needed war material.

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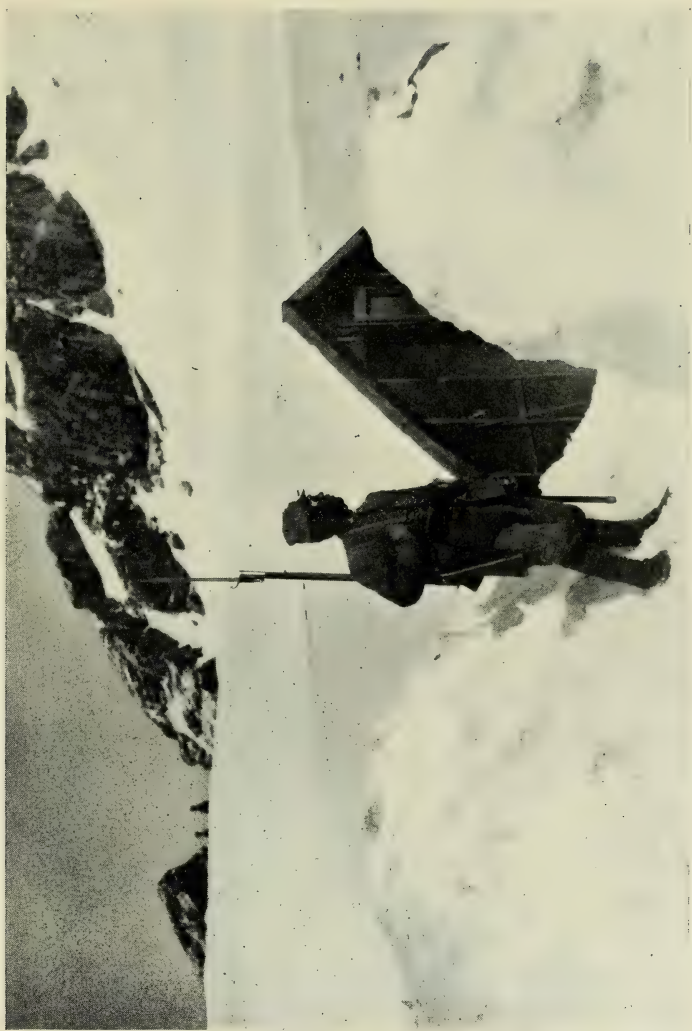
One of the Members of the Russian Parliamentary Delegation, which visited Italy in the summer, made an interesting speech on his return to Petrograd. His countrymen, he said, were filled with admiration by the almost superhuman efforts

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Chronicle*, Sept. 7, 1916.

by which the Italians have overcome the natural and physical obstacles to their progress. "Then we saw that batteries had been planted where, as it seemed to us, only the eagles could soar, we saw trenches excavated in the solid rock, and from them we knew that the troops had waged bitter war through all the rigours of the winter." It was not merely the courage and endurance of the soldiers that impressed the Russian visitors, but the manner in which the difficulties of transport, supply, and organisation had been surmounted.

An army, as we know, "marches on its stomach." In these days it may be added that it carries its stomach on wheels. Its chances of filling the hungry mouths of its men, the bigger and more hungry mouths of its cannon, depend upon the number of its wheeled vehicles, and its capacity to move them quickly. Somebody has said that six-sevenths of the art of war is the art of carrying heavy things from one place to another. Railways, roads, automobiles, motor-lorries, waggons, are the nervous and muscular system of a modern army in the field. Without them the valour of the troops is futile, and the skill of the generals wasted, and even the industry of the munition workers ineffective. For shells and cartridges are useless if they are not available at the right time and place for projecting against the enemy.

Italy had not only to make these weighty



*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

ON GUARD 10,000 FEET ABOVE THE SEA LEVEL





articles, but to drag them up a steeply rising country badly provided with facilities for rapid locomotion. There are only two trunk railway lines running northward to the Austrian frontier, one from Verona through the Trentino to Botzen and Innsbruck, the other through Udine and Pontebba to Villach, Klagenfurt, and ultimately Vienna.

The Austrians had ringed the whole frontier on their side with a railway system that starts from Riva at the head of Lake Garda, passes right round through the valleys of the Tyrol and Carinthia into Carniola, and then down to Trieste and Fiume. This line is connected with the main railway routes of the Empire and Germany, and it is supplemented by a network of roads, whereby the Austrians were enabled to deliver troops and stores rapidly to their southern border.

Here the communications broke off; the Italians did not venture to make strategic railways and roads on their own side, for to have done so, as I have pointed out, would have meant war with Austria any time during the past fifteen years, in spite of the Triple Alliance. Thus roads had to be largely dispensed with at the beginning of the operations, until they could be constructed or improved, by almost incredible exertions and an unsparing expenditure of labour, after war was declared. When I see these brown, sun-baked, bare-throated peasants and workmen, hewing,

chipping, digging, hammering, on the mountain-side, with tireless industry, in the dust and heat, I take off my hat to them. I hope their countrymen duly appreciate the brave, humble, patient fellows, I hope they will give them also badges and medals to hand down to their children when the victory is won. For they will have done as much to secure it as the adventurous Alpini or the dashing Bersaglieri or any other troops of the fighting first line.

The transport problem was complicated. Troops and supplies had to be collected from all parts of Italy, and conveyed to the northern corner of the Peninsula; and they had likewise to be shifted from one part of the long front to another, according to the tactical and strategic exigencies of the moment. Here the railways which interlace the plain of the Po, and their feeders from Central and Southern Italy, did their share and did it admirably. General Cadorna issued an Order of the Day, praising the managers and staffs of the railways for the manner in which they met the heavy demands of the military authorities in the first fortnight of June, when the great transfer of troops to the Trentino took place, and when the new 5th Army was embodied and carried to the front.

The eulogy is thoroughly deserved. The sudden strain cast upon the railways was tremendous, and

it says much for their management that they did not break down under it. On the contrary all went rapidly and even smoothly. The new army of five hundred thousand men was assembled from reserves, depots, drafts, and distant stations, formed into brigades and divisions, provided with its equipment and stores, and conveyed to its allotted positions, in little more than a week.

It adds to our astonishment to learn that, except for a few days, the railways did not find it necessary to exclude civilian traffic altogether. Throughout the campaign the service has been maintained with a quite extraordinary amount of regularity. Railway travelling in Italy goes on, right up to the war-zone itself and into it, almost "as usual," more so I think than in France and England. Some trains are suspended, especially those that used to serve the great tourist routes from Switzerland and France, for there are no tourists now. But the trains that continue to run arrive and depart with fair punctuality, and except for the numerous military uniforms in the carriages and on the platforms, and the minute inspection of passports, passes, and safe-conducts, the ordinary routine seems to prevail.

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The railways alone could not have coped with these rapid movements and transfers of troops.

Italy had another invaluable transport asset, as the Russian visitors noted, in the possession of the finest automobile factory in the world. The work of the Fiat Company of Turin is one of the romances of the war, as the history of the company itself is among the most amazing romances of industry. In Turin I spent many hours traversing these immense ranges of foundries, forges, engine-rooms, and machine shops, these vast sheds of concrete, glass, and iron, which seem to cover whole quarters of the city and suburbs, and house the activity of some eighteen thousand workmen.

Sixteen years ago there was no Fiat Company; the Fiat works had not begun to exist. Three gentlemen in Turin, interested in motoring, started a most modest little factory, with a few thousand francs capital, in order to supply themselves and their friends with automobiles of good construction at a reasonable price. One was a lieutenant of cavalry, another a man of business, the third an engineer. They secured the fine Fiat model, built about the best car then on the market, and by a combination of technical skill and organising ability in a few years they were in the very front of the trade, selling their engines and carriages all the world over.

To-day they own one of the two largest industrial establishments in Italy, and the largest automobile factory in Europe. There is nothing



in Britain, France, or Germany to compare with them. In the United States there are works which employ more men and sell more cars. But these American firms are not as complete and self-contained, they do not themselves make all the parts they assemble. In the Fiat shops they do everything. Nothing comes in from outside but the raw material: they make their own steel, their own bronze and brass, their own plant. The crude iron, aluminium, timber, are brought into the Turin works; they go out again as cars, lorries, trucks, engines for automobiles, engines for submarines, aeroplanes, all complete to the last film of varnish.

How many of these complex and finely finished machines they turn out every twenty-four hours, I know but may not tell. If I did perhaps I should not be believed. The number is incredible, or would be so, if incredible things were not happening every day of this wonder-age in which we live. One fact may be mentioned. When the great movement of the troops in the early part of June was being arranged the head of the Army Transport Department told the Fiat directors that he required 545 additional motor-vehicles within one week. It was a "large order," even for Fiat. But it was executed. During the specified seven days the carriages were put together, completed, and delivered to the military authorities: 545

automobiles, or to be correct 546, for an extra car was thrown in "for luck."

That wild rush of half a million men to the Trentino Front I did not see, but I have heard many stories of it from those who did. To some of these I have referred already. Strange spectacles were witnessed as the long columns raced breathlessly up the roads that run northward through the hills. There was no speed limit. By night as well as by day the cars tore and bumped, often over half-made tracks with perilous angular turns. Sometimes a machine broke down and the procession was held up till the course was cleared; sometimes one would fall into a torrent or roll off the dark unfenced road down a steep slope to destruction.

All kinds of vehicles were impressed and put to odd uses. Upon a street omnibus, licensed to carry twenty-six passengers, a whole platoon of soldiers, with all their kit, would cluster and swarm like bees. The headquarters staff of a division would travel in a tradesman's cart; and a mountain gun would loll luxuriously on the silken cushions of a fashionable lady's automobile. But in one way or the other the thing was done. The Army "got there"—in time.

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Just as Fiat came to the rescue with transport in

the time of deepest need, so the War Department, hard pressed for guns and projectiles, had a most valuable auxiliary in the Ansaldo works near Genoa. This great establishment, which is converting a beautiful corner of the Riviera Ponente into a kind of Italian Newcastle or Sheffield, long had close British affinities. It was founded by a couple of English engineers to make and repair locomotives for the Italian railways; and until a few years ago it worked in association with Armstrong's. Now, entirely under Italian management and direction—the very capable direction of Commendatore Pio Perrone and his brother—it takes rank among the prime shipbuilding and armament firms of the world, in the class of Elswick, Krupp, Creusot, and Vickers. It has its own foundry and steel works (one of the largest, perhaps eventually to be quite the largest, in Europe); it builds super-dreadnoughts, destroyers, torpedo-boats, motors, petrol engines, twelve-inch guns, field-guns, machine-guns, every instrument required for destruction and slaughter in gross and in detail.

When the European War broke out the Ansaldo directors rose to the occasion. They did not wait till Italy came in; they knew she would come in, sooner or later, and they got ready. Without orders from a still hesitating and undecided Ministry they set to work, enlarged their capacity,

laid down new machinery, engaged and trained fresh labour, and more than doubled the number of their hands. They were the first in Italy to recruit female munition workers, of whom, when I visited them in July, some eight hundred were engaged, not only in filling shells, but using lathe, cutting tool, and drilling machine, with the energy and skill of our own women operatives, and perhaps with superior physical strength: for they are strong-armed, deep-bosomed maids and matrons, these daughters of the plough, who have been bred to hoe and weed and dig and bear burdens (and many babies), in the maize-fields and fruit gardens of Liguria and Piedmont.

Ansaldo's built twelve hundred guns during those months while Italy was still neutral. These unsolicited cannon did much to save the situation, when the country at length plunged into war with a Power which, for eight years, had been preparing heavy ordnance of a class and calibre unknown before in operations on land.

A walk round the great machine-shops, gun-foundries, steelworks, and shipyards at Sampierdarena and Sestri Ponente gives you an almost overpowering impression of energy and activity. Here the mammoth installations and monstrous engines of modern metallurgical industry confront you everywhere, and stupefy you with their vastness and superhuman force. You see the





*Italian Headquarters Photographic Department.]*

A GUN EMPLOYMENT IN THE SNOW





immense furnaces and retorts where rivers of white-hot steel run like water, the yawning pits, dug deep into the earth, where the ingots for the great guns are cast. The guns themselves, huge hulks of grey metal, lie unregarded about the floor or sway from chains overhead. An iron door is thrown open, and you gaze into an inferno of glowing colour, violet, carmine, and blood-red, so fierce and fiery that it would blind you if your eyes were not shielded by a plate of smoked glass. You see the crucible tapped and the molten metal splashing from it like the runlets of a mountain cascade. You watch a workman cutting solid blocks of cold steel, as if they were butter, with the thin sword of flame from an oxy-hydrogen gas burner. You stand amazed once more at the wonder, familiar enough but always marvellous, of the steam-hammer, that miracle of irresistible and obedient strength, which heaves its ponderous ram aloft at the turn of a handle ; and at another turn brings it down, with a touch so light that it will hardly break an egg, or with a blow that will grind an oaken plank to sawdust.

It was strange to find oneself in this riot of industrial fury amid the exquisite peace of the Riviera. Outside the sea lay before us, a sheet of deep and motionless azure, asleep under the noon-day sun. The white-sailed boats, the blue flood, the shore set in brown and emerald, the dreaming

hills—this was Italy. But the throbbing factory, with its jarring engines and clattering wheels, its smoke-wreaths and gleams of red fire, this also was Italy, the new, restless Italy of scientific endeavour and practical achievement.

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I went back into Genoa, and told an English friend who lives in the noble city, that I had seen Ansaldo's. "Come with me," he said, "and I will show you something else likewise worth seeing."

We turned into a narrow street, and a still narrower alley, pushed at an inconspicuous door, and descended a few steps. I found myself in a tiny basement workshop, just a single room with a lathe, an anvil, and a small furnace. A stout, cheerful, middle-aged mechanic, in shirt-sleeves, busy at the lathe, gave us a courteous greeting, and readily explained his occupation.

He was making the ring-heads of shells for one of the munition factories, and had been doing nothing else for months, and expected to be doing it for months to come. Under the orders of the Government or the local Committee he had specialised at this job, for it was one that a skilled workman, with his own little plant, could perform expeditiously and well. The gauges and models were supplied to him, and his task was to turn out as many of the

metal rings as he could. He can deliver 150 of these articles in a week.

“Do you do it all yourself?” I asked. “Myself—yes!” he said; “*con questo ragazzo*,” pointing to a sturdy boy of fourteen blowing the bellows of the furnace. He was working seven days in the week, and earning what would seem a contemptible wage to our own labour aristocrats in the munitions district; but it was more than he usually made, and he was well content. Besides—“it helps *la patria*,” he said, with a smile.

So here was one phase of that mobilisation of industry which Ansaldo and Fiat represent at the other end of the scale. These small craftsmen, working on their own account, are to be found scattered over Italy, where the factory system is still too new to have absorbed them all; and any such mechanic who has a few tools for metal cutting, and the requisite skill, has been called upon to make war material, and so to do his own little “bit” towards helping *la patria* in the hour of its necessity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “La mobilisation civile a créé une véritable force d’arrière, formée de tous les ouvriers qui travaillent pour l’armée, et le moindre producteur est devenu, lui aussi, un participant à la guerre, un collaborateur, un soldat.”—CHARRIAUT AND AMICI-GROSSI, *L’Italie en guerre*, p. 254.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### WHY ITALY IS FIGHTING

AN ACT OF VOLITION—IDEALISTS AND REALISTS—  
“PER LAPIÙ GRANDEITALIA”—SACRED EGOISM—  
INCENTIVES TO PEACE—INDUSTRIAL PROGRESS—  
INFLUENCES AGAINST WAR—THE POLITICIANS—  
THE PARTY LEADERS—SIGNOR GIOLITTI—THE  
GREAT BOSS AND HIS MACHINE—GERMAN  
FINANCIAL PENETRATION—THE BANCA COM-  
MERCIALE AND ITS OFFSHOOTS—ITS ALLIANCE  
WITH GIOLITTISM—ITALY AND THE TRIPLE  
ALLIANCE—GROWING DISLIKE TO IT—AUSTRIAN  
AGGRESSIVENESS—SERBIAN PROJECT OF 1913—  
IDEA OF A “PREVENTIVE” WAR WITH ITALY  
—THE TREATY AND THE WAR IN 1914—ARTICLE  
VII—ITALY NOT BOUND OR CALLED UPON TO  
JOIN THE CENTRAL POWERS — NEUTRALITY  
EXPECTED

**T**HE case of Italy is somewhat different from that of other members of the Anti-German league. Like the rest she is fighting to vindicate individual and national liberties against militarist autocracy. But she was not compelled to fight in the vain effort to avert destruction, like Belgium and Serbia ; war was not forced on her



by the Central Powers, as it was upon France and Russia ; nor had she, like Britain, such obligations of honour and duty that she could not have stood aside without ignominy.

It is true that Italy had a good technical case for a breach with Austria ; but the wrong done to her, though serious, was not so overwhelming that she would have been disgraced if she had declined to go to war over it. She could undoubtedly have remained neutral if she had so chosen ; her present allies put no pressure upon her to draw the sword ; and the Germanic League was extremely anxious to keep her out of the belligerent circle. She came into the conflict of her own volition, after long deliberation, and with full appreciation of all the consequences involved. It must be admitted, then, that she is at war because she wished to be at war, because peace, at this crisis of the world's history, would have meant the abandonment of her aspirations, and the neglect of her interests.

She pursues both aims, the ideal and the material, with equal steadiness of purpose, for the Italians, more than most people, know how to cherish the one without losing sight of the other. The nation which produced Mazzini as well as Cavour, Petrarch no less than Machiavelli, is able to keep a balance between realism and idealism. M. Barrès tells us that even when he is talking with

D'Annunzio he cannot forget that he is in the country that gave birth to Mazarin.

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Everywhere in Italy just now you see the inscription: *Per la più grande Italia*—for the Greater Italy. The soldiers write it on the walls of their barracks, and fall with the words on their lips. It is the thought that nerves them in toil and danger. It means two things: it means an Italy greater in territory, in power, in commerce, in the world's estimation; and it means also an Italy greater in her own self-consciousness in that she will have fulfilled the dream of the *Risorgimento* and brought all the Italian peoples under one flag and one allegiance. *Per la più grande Italia* is the complement to that cry of *Italia unita* which sent the heroes and martyrs to the battle and the goal in the nineteenth century.

But if the Italian war—*la nostra guerra*—is one of ideals do not let us forget that the ideal is to be attained by the highly practical method of seizing territory, ports, islands, railways, strips of coast-line, naval bases. There are dreamers whose heads are not in the clouds, poets who will not be content with a diet of the most inspiring phrases, enthusiasts who mean business.

The combination is not new in Italy. Three-quarters of a century ago Vincenzo Gioberti, the

philosopher and thinker of Italian Nationalist Liberalism, wrote in his famous *Primato civile e morale degli Italiani*:—"What great things are we doing, we Italians? What are our achievements? Where are our fleets, our colonies? What place do our envoys hold at foreign courts—what authority, what influence do they wield? What weight does Italy throw into the European scale? Do foreigners know anything of our peninsula, do they visit it for any other reason but to enjoy the eternal beauty of its skies and gaze upon its ruins? Who talks of our glory, our riches, our power?"

That was in 1843; we might be listening to D'Annunzio in 1915. Again there is this haunting suggestion of impotence, of futility, of patronage, which so many Italian patriots resent. Perhaps that was implied in the declaration which the Prime Minister, Signor Salandra, emitted during the beginning of the negotiations with Austria, when he said that Italy's policy would be inspired by a "sacred egoism": self-assertion sanctified by high aims and an elevated patriotism.

It is then a war of ideals; but also, in a sense, a war of aggression, a war of conquest, like that which was waged against Turkey for the acquisition of Libya and the Dodecanese. For Italy, in some measure, resembles Germany rather than England and France. She is not one of the satiated nations, who want only to be left in undisturbed possession

of their winnings ; but, on the contrary, politically young, hungry, suffering still from growing pains ; with adolescent appetites that cannot well be satisfied without causing inconvenience somewhere. So, like Germany, and like Serbia, she is pricked by the fever of "expansion" ; and so she is waging war, as Germany is, to enlarge her place in the sun, though not with German methods or German contempt for the claims and liberties of others. Thus, though there is an ideal underlying Italy's motives, we need not suppose that her action, either in war-making or in peace-making, will on this account be unduly swayed by sentiment or a visionary altruism.

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Yet when the European War started, in the late summer of 1914, it might have seemed as though Italy were extremely unlikely to be drawn into it. She had declined to join the Central Powers in arms, on the ground that her obligations, under the Triple Alliance, did not cover the case of an aggressive war such as that precipitated by Austria's assault upon Serbia ; but it was a long step from this to participating with the Entente in active hostilities against her former associates. Neutrality was the obvious attitude ; and it was that which probably the great majority of Italians expected and at the time approved.



Italy was not in a warlike mood ; nor, though it had thrown itself with some animation into the carefully limited contest with Turkey, had war occupied any large share of its attention during the preceding years. In those years the national energies had been concentrating on industrial progress and internal reconstruction. The country had begun to share in the economic revival which had come in turn to most of the other European states, it was entering upon the process of change that had modified so profoundly the life of Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, and some provinces of Austria and Russia.

To casual foreign eyes Italy appears so blessed by the bounty of nature that the poverty, which weighs heavily on much of this smiling land, is not seen. The Italians themselves know that since their cities ceased to be the markets of the world's trade they have had but a scanty share of the world's wealth. They know that the country is in reality still poor. A third of it is mountain and forest, its mineral resources are small, its soil is in large districts so thin that a living can only be eked from it by incessant and remorseless labour. But other poor countries have become rich by manufactures, trade, financial exploitation. Why not Italy ?

The intelligence of the country was much inclined to apply itself to this question. And the results were promising. The most capable minds of



their generation were turning to commerce and industry, and the people generally were absorbed in the works of peace. Internal reconstruction and economic reform were the subjects of discussion in the press and at political meetings. How to relieve the poverty and servile conditions of the masses, how to increase the productive capacity of the nation, were topics of which more was heard than foreign policy.

Italy's prime wealth lay in her reservoir of cheap and willing labour, and it was asked why this should be drained off year by year to enrich foreign countries. Let us export goods, they said, instead of exporting men.

Substantial progress had been made in some provinces. In Piedmont and Lombardy, in particular, industry and commerce were moving forward in long strides; manufactures were growing; in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Leghorn, Naples, and other large towns, there were all the signs of expanding comfort and rising luxury.

The mercantile and propertied classes had never been so well off, and they looked with confidence on the future. Nothing could be more distasteful than war, which would interrupt all this peaceful activity, and involve unknown and unwelcome dangers and adventures. The intellectual classes were turning eagerly to scientific and learned study, the traders and manufacturers wished to go on

money-making, the reformers were intent on social amelioration, the working-classes saw prospects of better wages, the peasantry only asked for lighter taxes and larger markets. Nobody wanted war : least of all the politicians.

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Italian politics had suffered from that partial eclipse of parliamentary institutions which had come upon the other nations of the European family. But in Italy there were special causes for the decline. Owing to the clerical boycott of the ballot-boxes many men of education and standing who were professing Catholics, as nearly all Italians are if they are not freethinkers or "freemasons," declined to take part in the elections or to come forward as candidates.

The wealthy bourgeoisie were immersed in trade and industry ; the aristocracy, disliking the turmoil and trouble of popular election under a wide democratic franchise, had almost fallen out of politics. Some great nobles, like the late Marquis di San Giuliano, still entered the diplomatic service, from which they occasionally passed into the Senate and the Government ; but as a rule the dukes and marquises avoided the Chamber and the Cabinet. The members of the famous Italian families, whose very names are a challenge to the imagination,

Visconti, Colonna, Doria, Pallavicini, and others, were to be found in the cavalry regiments, or living on their estates, or amusing themselves with the pleasures of Roman society, or sometimes occupied with the new phases of banking and finance; not many of them were attracted by parliamentary life.

The advocates, professors, publicists, minor local magnates, and semi-professional politicians, who rose to the surface in the Chamber of Deputies, and managed party affairs, were not particularly well known to the bulk of their countrymen. Some of their leaders were men of ability and high character; but in Italy, as in other states of Western Europe, it had happened that those who controlled public business owed their position to industry, knowledge of affairs, and the respect felt for their integrity and experience, rather than to any magnetic force of personality or exceptional brilliancy.

It is singular that the greatest crisis in the history of mankind found Europe scantily provided with great men. Italy, like the other countries, had some talent but little genius. And, as in the other countries, the emergency brought out unsuspected qualities; firmness, judgment, and patriotism were found sufficient to overcome difficulties before which perhaps genius would have failed.

There was, however, one outstanding figure in Italian politics. For many years past Signor

Giovanni Giolitti had dominated the legislature and the administration. He had been Finance Minister as long ago as 1889, had been in and out of Cabinets ever since, and had thrice held the premiership. In or out of office his was the controlling spirit. He was, as Gladstone once said of himself, an old parliamentary hand, a hand of vigorous grasp and exceeding dexterity. If he was not a great statesman, nor a deep thinker, he was a master of the art of party management, an adept in what the Americans call "machine" politics. He ran the Italian political machine as the bosses of Tammany Hall used to run the municipal business of New York City; and by much the same devices.

It is not necessary to impugn his motives or to question his patriotism. He may have thought that the method he adopted was the only way to remove the uncertainty and insecurity of government by party in a country where the constitutional system was still raw, and that the best interests of Italy could be served by creating a stable majority of some kind. For the shifting groups, moved by vague cries and dependent on popular caprice, he substituted a compact, disciplined body of parliamentary legionaries, dependent on himself.

The organisation of this well-drilled cohort was carried out with perseverance, adroitness, and a plentiful lack of scruple. All the arguments which

appealed to the weaker, and some also which influence the stronger, side of human nature were brought to bear. It was made worth while for a politician with aspirations to enlist under the Giolittian banner. I once asked a famous American boss to tell me how he contrived to retain the fidelity of his miscellaneous following. "Well," he replied; "the boys trust me. They know that if they look after me I will look after them."

Signor Giolitti looked after his "boys." The deputy or the elector, who voted straight—or voted crooked—at his bidding, knew that he stood a good chance of getting what he wanted; those who defied him had to reckon with a relentless antagonism. The spoils of office went to the obedient and were severely withheld from the insubordinate. Individuals, corporations, localities, found that their desires—good or bad—could be fulfilled by arranging with the great party manager, and were almost certain to be thwarted if they opposed him.

"Giolittism" became a recognised factor in Italian public life, and in due course the most potent factor. It prevailed at the ballot-boxes and in Parliament. There was no force in the Chamber that could stand against the trained battalion, which manœuvred so effectively at the word of command, and was quite ready to attack universal suffrage at one sitting and defend it at the next, if so ordered. It was an accepted axiom that no



Cabinet could live without the support of Signor Giolitti, or in opposition to him. When he chose he took the premiership himself. When it suited him he would retire in favour of a successor on whom he thought he could rely. When the European conflagration came the "Dictator" was seventy-two ; but age had not lessened his energy nor abated his influence. He was still the power behind the throne in Italian politics.

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There was another power more subtle, pervasive, and penetrating with which he was closely associated. Few foreigners before the war knew how far the German financial subjugation of Italy had gone ; nor do they see it now in all its significance unless they read such books as those of Preziosi and Henri Hauser,<sup>1</sup> in which the details of the amazing story are given. These writers and others have shown how Germany, through its financial and mercantile agencies, was throwing its tentacles about Italy.

The Banca Commerciale, nominally an Italian concern, in reality directed by German nominees intimately connected with great German financial groups, and through them with the German

<sup>1</sup> G. Preziosi, *La Germania alla Conquista dell' Italia* (Florence, 1916); Henri Hauser, *Les méthodes allemandes d'expansion économique* (Paris, 1916).

Government, was the nerve-centre of the process. In less than twenty years from the time of its modest and unobtrusive installation it had made itself an unrivalled power in Italian finance, and had its hands upon many of the most important industrial enterprises throughout the Peninsula. It owned shares in many joint-stock companies and numerous private businesses; and it took care that in their conduct the interests of German manufacturers, exporters, and investors were effectively promoted. It achieved successes commensurate with its multifarious activities and limitless versatility. Turin, Naples, Genoa, Bari, Catania, above all Milan, were becoming financial colonies of Germany.

But it did not confine its energies to business, or rather it mixed business with other matters. It took an active, though unacknowledged, part in social and public affairs. In a poor country, just awakening to the seduction of money-making by short cuts, a great organisation, which had the disposal of cash and shares, found no difficulty in gaining influence. It could interest Roman and Lombard society by the offer of directorates and speculative facilities; it had places of various kinds, managerships, clerkships, appointments abroad, for useful clients of a humbler rank; it could offer more sordid blandishments to those who would receive them.

It was keenly interested in the press and is said to have been always open to an arrangement with any journal or journalist prepared to accept its attentions. It maintained a "bureau of commercial information" which was in close touch with the German secret service. For the bank was a political as well as a financial organisation, and one of its main functions was to permeate Italian politics with the Teutophil idea. To this end it directed its subterranean activities upon municipal and parliamentary politics, and was ready to offer its aid to candidates and representatives of known Germanic sympathies. It had its agents, partners, and friends in the municipalities, the Chamber of Deputies, the public offices, sometimes in the Cabinet.

Between "Giolittism" and these Teutonic crusaders there was an excellent understanding. Signor Giolitti was the strongest Italian champion of the Triple Alliance. In internal politics he was something of an expert, and he had carried useful administrative reforms. But of international affairs he knew little,<sup>1</sup> and had hardly given the subject serious attention. He held that the

<sup>1</sup> So little that according to Dr. Dillon he wanted Signor Salandra to appoint as Foreign Minister a deputy named Schanzer, who was an Austrian by birth, a Jew by religion, and entirely destitute of diplomatic experience. But he could speak three languages, and the Dictator thought that was sufficient qualification. Also—he was an ardent Giolittian in politics. Dillon, *From the Triple to the Quadruple Alliance*, p. 159.

only safe course for Italy was to work in strict and constant co-operation with Germany, and that the political, as well as the economic, ties between the two nations should be strengthened by all possible means.

Holding such views he was naturally the prime favourite of the Banca Commerciale group. They were always anxious to do what they could for any follower of the man who was at once the Dictator of Italian politics and the determined supporter of Teutonism. The two powers had contrived to get many of their partisans into the administrative services. A great Italian manufacturer told me that there was hardly an official in any government department, from the chief secretary to the outdoor messenger, who was not either a Giolittian or a pro-German. This was an exaggeration; but these anti-national bureaucrats were certainly numerous enough to cause serious embarrassment during the first months of the war.

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Italy had writhed uneasily under the Triple Alliance. The convention had never been popular; but it had been accepted in May, 1882, and it had been renewed from time to time, as a disagreeable, but necessary, means of relieving Italy from the isolation in which she would otherwise have stood. From France she had become

estranged by the annexation of Tunis, and by the denunciation of the commercial treaty of 1887, which had inflicted upon her serious economic losses.<sup>1</sup> England was deemed cold and indifferent ; Russian designs in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean exposed her to some suspicion. Italy wanted a powerful friend, and Germany was only too willing to offer for the part. It seemed worth while to accept this influential partnership, even though it involved association with Germany's neighbour and confederate.

But the Alliance had been viewed of recent years with increasing distrust by Italian statesmen. They saw that it had done little for them and a good deal for their allies. The two Imperial Governments treated the Kingdom with contempt, except when they wanted its assistance, and one of them with scarcely concealed hostility. The compact had been hailed as a league of peace ; but in fact it seemed to be a means for enabling Germany to shake the mailed fist with impunity in the face of

<sup>1</sup> In 1885, two years before the rupture of the Treaty of Commerce, Italian exports to France had amounted to 513,600,000 lire annually. By 1913 they had fallen to 231,500,000. During the same period the exports to Germany had increased from 105,200,000 lire to 343,500,000, and German imports into Italy from 120,400,000 to 612,700,000. France, which had been by far the largest market for Italian goods in the former year, stood only fourth on the list in the latter, having been passed by Switzerland, that economic annexe of Germany, as well as by England. See Charriaut and Amici-Grossi, *L'Italie en Guerre*, p. 146.



rivals, and assisting Austria to carry out projects of aggression in the Near East.

Italy's own efforts at expansion were ignored or thwarted. Her Tripoli enterprise not only received no support but was openly discouraged, and secretly obstructed. Austria forbade her to bombard Turkish ports on the mainland, or to occupy Chios and Mitylene; Germany assisted the Turks with arms and money, and long after the war was over was quietly aiding Enver and his gang to stir up disaffection in the new province.

Meanwhile Austria was herself invoking the Treaty to secure Italian acquiescence in her Balkanic schemes. She disturbed the *status quo* by incorporating Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then called on her allies to stand by her in the diplomatic campaign which ensued. But she went further. In August, 1913, just before the Bucharest Treaty between the Balkan belligerents was signed, the Austrian Government informed the Italian Foreign Office that it proposed to go to war with Serbia in order to "defend" itself against this formidable state, and that it would expect the military support of its ally.

This was too much for Italian complaisance. The Marquis di San Giuliano, the Italian Foreign Minister, refused to have any concern with so menacing a "defensive" operation, and put the case very plainly at Berlin, with the result that

the German Government placed its veto upon the Austrian proposals.<sup>1</sup> The "chastisement" of Serbia was postponed for another year, and then it was not thought necessary to consult Italy beforehand.<sup>2</sup>

But Austria knew that the realisation of her south-eastern ambitions would be almost as distasteful to Italy as to the Serbs; and it seems to have been a question with the extreme militarist party in Vienna whether it might not be wiser to tackle the greater obstacle before the lesser. Dr. Dillon tells us that in 1913, after the failure of the attempt on Serbia, General Konrad von Hoetzendorf, with the concurrence of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, endeavoured to persuade the Emperor to sanction a "preventive war" against Italy, on the plea that sooner or later a quarrel with that state was bound to come, and it might be as well to begin it without further delay.

This iniquitous suggestion was not liked by Count Aehrenthal, nor by the Emperor, who was then perhaps rather more *potens sui* than he became in the course of the next twelve months. The Archduke was sharply rebuked, and Von Konrad dis-

<sup>1</sup> These extraordinary transactions were kept private till revealed by Signor Giolitti in the Italian Chamber of Deputies in December, 1914.

<sup>2</sup> Though, as a matter of fact, the Italian Government knew very well what was coming, and warned the Entente Powers to be on their guard. When the archives of the period are open to examination it will perhaps be found that certain happenings in England in July, 1914, were not unconnected with this friendly intimation.

missed from his post as Chief of the General Staff, only, however, to be reinstated soon afterwards. Possibly some inkling of these transactions had reached Italian ears, and if so that may account for the urgency with which the Alliance was renewed, a year before the prescribed date for its extension.<sup>1</sup>

If Austria had tried to drag Italy into a "defensive" war in 1913 she seems scarcely to have expected that her ally would join her in 1914 in a war of pure aggression. Italy, at any rate, took prompt advantage of a clause in the Treaty which was intended to guard her against such a contingency. Article VII of that instrument is in these terms:

Austria-Hungary and Italy, who aim exclusively at the maintenance of the *status quo* in the East, bind themselves to employ their influence to prevent every territorial change which may be detrimental to one or other of the contracting Powers. They will give each other all explanations necessary for the elucidation of their respective intentions as well as those of other Powers. If, however, in the course of events the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Balkans and on the Ottoman coasts and in the islands of the Adriatic and Ægean seas should become impossible, and if, either in consequence of the acts of a third Power or of other causes, Austria and Italy should be compelled to change the *status quo* by a temporary or permanent occupation, such occupation shall only take place after

<sup>1</sup> Dillon, *From the Triple to the Quadruple Alliance*, pp. 33-50. Dr. Dillon, who was in Vienna at the time, appears to have derived his information from General Konrad von Hoetzendorf himself.

previous agreement between the two Powers, based on the principle of a reciprocal arrangement for all the advantages, territorial or other, which one of them may secure outside the *status quo*, and in such a manner as to satisfy all the legitimate claims of both parties.

Under this clause it seemed clear that Austria was estopped from calling upon her ally to carry out the obligations which she had herself set at nought. Austria-Hungary, by forcing war upon Serbia, was evidently desirous of changing the *status quo* in the Near East. She had not given explanations tending to the "elucidation" of her very obscure "intentions," nor any adequate explanation at all. A temporary or permanent occupation of Serbian territory was plainly contemplated; but no "previous agreement" had been made with Italy, nor was any hint given of that "reciprocal arrangement" provided for by Article VII.

In these circumstances it must have been recognised in Vienna and Berlin that Italian active aid would not be forthcoming. Nor apparently was it wanted. The Prussian and Austrian War Staffs believed that they could overcome their foes without further assistance. France, according to the programme, was to be knocked out by one paralysing blow, and Russia would then be compelled to make peace on such terms as were imposed upon her. The Central Powers felt

themselves strong enough to carry through their tremendous scheme of conquest without the support of the ill-prepared Italian Army, and the unready Italian Fleet. It would be sufficient if Italy would simply maintain a benevolent neutrality. And the two Imperial Foreign Offices, without giving themselves the pains to treat their ally with even such formal consideration as international etiquette prescribed, assumed that to this extent their wishes would be fulfilled. Italy would keep quiet.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE END OF THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE

THE NEUTRALITY OF ITALY—INFLUENCES IN ITS FAVOUR—THE CAPITALISTS—THE VATICAN—THE SOCIALISTS—THE ARMY—THE POLITICAL LEADERS—ATTITUDE TOWARDS AUSTRIA—THE “PARECCHIO”—DEATH OF THE MARQUIS DI SAN GIULIANO—BARON SONNINO—HIS DIPLOMACY—HE STATES ITALY’S CASE UNDER ARTICLE VII—THE AUSTRIAN NEGATIVE—GERMAN INTERVENTION—CESSION OF TERRITORY SUGGESTED—BARON BURIAN’S OBJECTION TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT—GERMANY ADVISES CONCESSIONS—INADEQUATE AUSTRIAN OFFERS—BURIAN’S DILATORY METHODS—A PROPOSAL AND A TRAP—IMMEDIATE CESSION REQUIRED, NOT A PROMISSORY NOTE—ITALIAN DEMANDS FORMULATED—REJECTED—AUSTRIA DECLINES TO OFFER MORE THAN A CESSION IN THE TREN-TINO—NEGOTIATIONS BROKEN OFF—SONNINO’S DESPATCH OF MAY 3—THE TRIPLE ALLIANCE AT AN END

**I**N the autumn of 1914 it seemed probable that the wishes of the Germanic Power would be fulfilled. The general current of feeling in Italy ran somewhat strongly against intervention. The

people, as I have said, were in no warlike mood, and disinclined for unknown and hazardous adventure. The most influential classes in the country were Germanophil in their sympathy, or at any rate they had no predilection for the Entente states. The jealousy of France, due to the Tunis affair and the economic rupture, had been softened but not entirely dissipated. For England there was respect, and the tradition of a long-standing amity, but no enthusiasm.

The European war had not yet been envisaged as a struggle between the forces of liberty and those of despotism. At the outset to most Italians, as indeed to many persons in the other neutral countries, it seemed to be the natural result of the sustained rivalry between two international associations, each bent on obtaining territorial and other advantages at the expense of the other. Not till later was the ethical significance of the conflict widely appreciated in Italy. Neutrality seemed the safest course, and the one most consistent with Italian interests.

The neutralists had the support, not only of the great body of quiet folks, but of the most important interests. For reasons already mentioned the idea of a quarrel with Germany was viewed with repugnance in the leading circles of finance and commerce. Roman society, sedulously cultivated by German diplomatic and other agencies, was Teutophil. The Vatican was flagrantly on the

same side. If Prussia was Protestant (or pagan), the Hapsburg sovereign was the Most Catholic Emperor and Apostolic King, the most august crowned son of the Church.

Germany had purged itself of the stigma of the Falk Laws and gone to Canossa long since ; and it was keeping up an energetic propaganda at the Curia. Austrian and German cardinals had the ear of Benedict XV, and they induced the perplexed Pontiff to assume an attitude of detachment towards the moral issues involved in the war, which seemed, to outraged Catholics in Belgium and elsewhere, strangely unfitting the Vicar of Christ on earth. But it encouraged the extreme Catholics, the "blacks," who disliked the godless French Republic which patronised socialists and "freemasons" and other foes of the Church.

The Italian socialists were pacifists, with a rooted objection to international complications which would interfere with domestic reform. Even the Army was averse from quarrelling with the great armed Powers ; for the officers had been trained on the German model, and they regarded the German military system with unqualified admiration. Its chiefs, too, knew that Italy was in no condition for war on the modern scale, and were reluctant to precipitate a contest with a well-equipped and extremely formidable antagonist.

The neutralists were strong in political and administrative circles. All Signor Giolitti's great influence was cast into their scale. Signor Salandra, the Prime Minister, had entered office as a nominee of Giolitti, and was supposed to share his former leader's views on international policy. The Marquis di San Giuliano, the Foreign Minister, a diplomatist of long experience and high reputation, was understood to be strongly in favour of maintaining the *entente* with the Central Powers. The War Minister was a Giolittian of so pronounced a tendency that he refused, even after the beginning of the campaign in Europe, to carry out the military reforms demanded by General Cadorna and General Porro ; and it was only after a severe struggle that he was induced to resign and hand over his portfolio to Signor Zupelli, a statesman more amenable to the counsels of the Chief of the Staff. Of the leading politicians out of office the most conspicuous was Baron Sonnino, who had twice been Prime Minister, and had begun his political career thirty-two years earlier as the most ardent champion of that Triple Alliance to which, by the irony of events, he was destined to deal the *coup de grâce*.

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The leading neutralists were anxious to keep the peace with Austria, and they hoped that Austria

would make the task possible by concessions which would satisfy the popular sentiment. The great majority of Italians had always clung to the *Italia Irredenta* idea. They believed that sooner or later the unity of the kingdom would be completed by the incorporation of the Trentino, the Trieste district, and the Dalmatic coast and islands ; and many of them were convinced that Italy would eventually regain her primacy in the Adriatic, and secure opportunities for expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean. But there was a general impression that these ends would be reached in due course by negotiation and arrangement, and that it was not worth while to snatch at them by resorting to force.

The European war was, of course, a great opportunity ; but chiefly, it was held in many quarters, because of the prospect it opened to Italy of gaining satisfaction for her demands by dexterously taking advantage of Austria's desire to avoid further complications. Signor Giolitti gave expression to this opinion when he said that Italy must be content with a *parecchio*,<sup>1</sup> a something in hand, which could be obtained by diplomatic means, and would at least be sufficient for the time.

It was not a very inspiring thought, this notion of being put off with a sort of *pourboire* or gratuity, which Austria might have the generosity to hand

<sup>1</sup> The word is commonly used, especially in Piedmont, for something of small account, some trifle.



over, and Signor Giolitti's *parecchio* roused no enthusiasm. However, if war, with all its hardships, privations, and economic disintegration, could be avoided, so much the better; and if Austria had been willing to make the *parecchio*, the "something," a fairly substantial thing, and had said so frankly at the beginning, the rupture would probably have been averted.

But it was presently seen that the Austrian *parecchio* was going to be a very small thing indeed, and even that was not to be had without strenuous pressure. The Italian Government went to work very quietly. The first communications of the Marquis di San Giuliano to Count Berchtold were couched in terms so moderate that they may have perhaps only confirmed the Ballplatz in the insolent belief that Italy could be safely ignored. Perhaps it relied upon San Giuliano's reputation as a confirmed "triplicist," and his belief that a permanent equilibrium could be maintained between the Entente group and the Central Powers. But the Marquis died on October 6th, 1914, after an illness so brief and sudden as to induce that tactful commentator on events, Count Reventlow, to suggest that the Italian interventionists had poisoned him! His death put the portfolio of Foreign Affairs into stronger hands and gave a sharper turn to the negotiations.

Baron Sidney Sonnino, who emerged from

temporary retirement to become San Giuliano's successor, was one of the most distinguished public men in Italy. He had sat in Parliament thirty-four years, had been in several cabinets, and had held the premiership twice. He was sixty-seven years of age at this time, born in the city of Pisa, the son of a Jewish father and an English mother. His origin tempts to those racial generalisations which are so facile and often so misleading. One critic, a French one, finds that Signor Sonnino possesses "un flegme tout britannique," being under the mistaken impression that the British are a phlegmatic people. Another observer detects in the Foreign Minister "British steadiness, tenacity, and reserve, combined with Jewish penetrative observation, subtle analysis, and a marked tendency to scepticism."

However this may be Baron Sonnino showed himself a diplomatist of the best quality, calm, even-tempered, acute, and unfalteringly firm. In Parliament he does not shine as an orator; but his despatches cannot easily be surpassed for lucidity, precision, and argumentative force. These qualities he revealed in the "conversations" he initiated with the chiefs of the Austrian Foreign Office; who ought to have been speedily convinced (though apparently they were not) that they had to deal with a statesman who had no intention of being put off by subterfuges, or turned from his point by prevarication and delay.

Count Berchtold and his successor, Baron Burian,

could not believe that Italy "meant business," or that even in the last resort King Victor Emmanuel's government would go to war. They knew—they had excellent means of knowing—the state of opinion in the Peninsula, and they thought that it would be impossible for Signor Sonnino and Signor Salandra to adopt extreme measures.

But they did not reckon either on the Foreign Minister's cold persistence, or on the change in public sentiment which was developing. The interventionists, headed by a group of "intellectuals," and finding their mouthpiece in Signor Albertini, the editor of the *Corriere della Sera*, the most influential newspaper in Italy, were making headway. In spite of the German propagandists, the allied cause was beginning to be better understood.

The neutralists were already losing ground, and before the end of the autumn savage caricatures of Signor Giolitti were appearing in the newspapers, and ferocious lampoons in the *graffiti* or mural inscriptions, by which, according to immemorial custom, the Italian populace expresses its feelings in periods of excitement.

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The unquestionable infraction of Article VII of the Triple Alliance Treaty had put Italy on strong ground. Her case was succinctly set forth in the despatch which Sonnino addressed to the Italian Ambassador at Vienna on December 9th, 1914,

and in which he laid stress on the manifestations of public opinion which were beginning to make themselves felt. He pointed out that the Austrian Government, " basing its actions precisely on what is set forth in Article VII," prevented Italy in the war with Turkey from carrying out several military operations which would certainly have shortened the war. He added that the invasion of Serbia had already disturbed the Balkan equilibrium, and had given Italy a claim to compensation, under this same article. Italy's national aspirations must be " taken seriously into account." Therefore in a " friendly spirit " Count Berchtold was urgently invited to state what the Imperial and Royal Government was prepared to do in the matter.<sup>1</sup>

The Imperial and Royal Government was at the moment not disposed to do anything. The Duke d'Averna, the Italian ambassador at Vienna, was told by Count Berchtold that the war against Serbia " was not aggressive but defensive," so that Austria was really fighting to maintain the *status quo* ; and that being so he " did not think that this was at present a case calling for an exchange of views with the Royal Italian Government." <sup>2</sup> It was only under pressure from Berlin that he consented to discuss the subject at all. On

<sup>1</sup> *Italian Green Book*, No. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Italian Green Book*, No. 5.

December 20th he went so far as to say that he would be prepared for an "exchange of views" as to the indemnities which Italy might receive in the event of a temporary or permanent occupation of Balkan territory.

In the meanwhile Prince von Bülow had arrived in Rome as special envoy from the German Government. He called on Signor Sonnino to explain that the object of his visit to Italy was to improve the good relations between the two states. Germany was evidently disinclined to take the Italian question so lightly as its partner. It was prepared to admit that Italy had some claim to compensation under Article VII, which it could afford to do the more readily as the compensation would be paid by Austria. The Foreign Minister summed up the situation in Italy in a few sentences :

The majority of the nation was in favour of the preservation of neutrality, and ready to support the Government in this; but only upon the presupposition that by means of neutrality it should be possible to obtain the fulfilment of certain national aspirations.

Germany was quite ready to consent to a sacrifice—on the part of Germany's friends. "The conviction," wrote the Italian ambassador at Berlin on January 6th, 1915, "that it is absolutely necessary for Austria to resign herself to some sacrifice to Italy, if she wishes to avoid disagreeable events, has by now penetrated all governing circles here."



Austria began to unbend a little. It seemed that she also might be prepared for "sacrifices," provided they were made by other people. There was Albania, for example : how would it suit Italy to have something there—"a country in the neighbourhood of Italy and easy of access" ? This was like trying to placate a man who complains that you have robbed him by telling him that he can make things even by robbing somebody else. Austria had no power to barter away Albania, and Baron Sonnino drily replied that Italy's chief interest in that region was to keep other people from interfering with it. And he pointed out that it was the Italian element in Austria with which the Roman Government was concerned, an element which must either be "stifled by the pressure of other nationalities, Slav and German," or else must detach itself from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. "It might be more advisable in the interests of the general and international situation for that empire to proceed to such amputation."

This was plain speaking ; but Germany was also talking "amputation" to her ally. Prince von Bülow suggested that perhaps Austria might be induced to cede the Trentino, at any rate if the cession were kept secret till after the war. Sonnino's answer was that the surrender of this territory would have to be made public ; it must take immediate effect ; and it would not of itself satisfy the "national aspirations," which included

Trieste as well. To which Prince Bülow could only reply that though he thought he might possibly prevail on Austria to part with Trent he had no hope of persuading her to give up the great port on the Adriatic.

The Austrian Foreign Minister, Baron Burian, who had now succeeded Count Berchtold, showed extreme reluctance to enter upon the question of ceding territory, which he would only discuss in very vague terms; and he continued to wonder "why Italy should not have sought in other territories the compensation to which she was entitled."<sup>1</sup> It was hinted that when the Western Allies were beaten there might be good pickings from them: Corsica, for instance, or Bizerta, possibly Egypt. And Sonnino and Avarna continued to repeat that this was not the way in which their "aspirations" could be gratified, and that the only cession which could be considered must necessarily be that of Austrian territory, not territory belonging to others which Austria was not in a position to give away. Italy was hardly likely to abandon her claims on Austria under Article VII in return for Austria's gracious permission to try if she could not rob France of Corsica or extract Egypt from England.

Baron Burian, however, remained obstinate and dilatory, and dwelt chiefly upon the difficulties which

<sup>1</sup> *Italian Green Book*, No. 16 (Jan. 28, 1915).

would arise in the Monarchy if the Italian "point of view" were accepted or even discussed, and on Italy's own alleged *lâches* in occupying Vallona and the Ægean islands. He also persisted that there was no cause for action in regard to Serbia until it was clearly seen whether Austria really intended to "annihilate" that hapless country. Austria must get through her military operations in the Balkans first. Then it might be time to talk of other things. But as to territorial compensation—on this point, the Duke d'Avarna wrote to his chief, "it is idle to entertain illusions. The Imperial and Royal Government will never, under present conditions, consent to the cession of territories belonging to the Monarchy."

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But Germany again interfered and induced Vienna to give some sign of softening. Berlin was growing nervous. At Potsdam, where they knew a good deal about the Italian Army, they perhaps did not accept the Viennese view of its value as a fighting force. And German interests in Italy were much too important to be sacrificed to the *amour-propre* of its Imperial ally. Austria would have to see if she could not get rid of the Italian menace by giving up something: not much, of course, but still something.

But Italy wanted a good deal. She was not going to be content with any *parecchio*. She wanted such a rectification of frontiers as would put herself, instead of Austria, on the upper side of the precipices and passes, fortified and barricaded against her by Austria, which she has been since winning back by the outpouring of so much Italian blood. She wanted the whole of *Italia Irredenta*, that of Istria and Gorizia as well as that of Trentino and the Dolomites. She wanted Trieste to be freed from Austrian rule, even if she did not herself incorporate it. She wanted a free hand at Vallona and its hinterland; and the main group of Southern Dalmatian islands, including Curzola, Lesina, and Lissa.

Further, in the coming readjustment in the Eastern Mediterranean Italy was looking for a share of the Turkish islands, and some opportunity for expansion and exploitation in Asia Minor. The Dardanelles expedition was beginning. It was supposed that it would succeed. The Allies would force their way to Constantinople and the liquidation of the Turkish Empire would soon come. Was Italy to sit still and lose all the fruits of her Mediterranean efforts? Might it not be advisable to come to a prompt understanding with the Entente Powers? What Austria, even under German insistence, might be persuaded to offer was a very small instalment of what was sought.

The negotiations dragged on and the Italian diplomatists were growing weary of Baron Burian's calculated procrastination. "My conversations with him," wrote the Italian ambassador on March 3rd, "might be prolonged everlastingly without leading to any practical result." Sonnino instructed him by telegraph the next day to tell Baron Burian that if Austria-Hungary should undertake any further military action in the Balkans without a previous settlement of the compensation question, Italy would consider the alliance at an end and would "resume her full liberty of action"; and that no proposal to discuss compensation would be entertained unless it included the cession of territories actually possessed by Austria-Hungary.

This direct thrust made some impression. Bülow, "deeply concerned," called on Sonnino; he was instructed to state that Austria was now prepared to negotiate on the proposed basis. But Germany and Austria would like a preliminary statement in the Italian Parliament which would be "edited in concert with Vienna."<sup>1</sup> Further, it appeared that both Austria and Germany had an invincible objection to the immediate transfer of ceded territory. Would not Italy agree that any arrangement which might be made should not take effect till the conclusion of the European war?

<sup>1</sup> *Italian Green Book*, No. 39.



These suggestions were a trap into which Sonnino was much too wary to walk. Why had the diplomatists of the two despotisms conceived this novel respect for representative assemblies? The reason was obvious. Prince von Bülow was anxious to transfer the negotiations to the floor of the Chamber of Deputies, where they would be open to the manipulation of Signor Giolitti.

In Parliament the great political condottiere was still powerful. Whatever might be the feeling outside his janissaries in the House were faithful to their salt. They could be relied upon to obey their commander and to march at his bidding—anywhere. One of the principal nationalist newspapers wrote of them in this furious strain :

These lawmongers had, and have, their chief, their symbol, their self-lord, Giolitti, in whose name they load themselves with infamy and treason. They had and have a common denominator ; they bear a hall-mark by which they are recognised, they possess a business house in which to conceal their cynical trading in morality—the Parliament. The Parliament is Giolitti ; Giolitti is the Parliament ; the binomial expression of our shame.<sup>1</sup>

Sonnino and Salandra had not the least intention of submitting the negotiations with Vienna to the doubtful censorship of these legislators.

<sup>1</sup> *Idea Nazionale*, quoted by Dillon, *From the Triple to the Quadruple Alliance*, p. 132.

Nor would they accept the *post-bellum* condition. Burian and Bülow argued plausibly for this. It would be so difficult to give up Austrian territory in the middle of a war ; such a painful blow to his Imperial Majesty ; so troublesome to arrange all the intricate details, surrender of Church lands and Crown property, apportionment of dues and the like, in these stressful times ; so hard on the poor Tyrolese soldiers now fighting bravely for their Kaiser. Why not wait till we have won the war and then we can make the cession effective in a dignified fashion ? To which Sonnino replied in effect : “ *But suppose you don't win ?* ” He knew that if Austria were worsted she would have plenty of “ compensations ” to make elsewhere, and would be unwilling, perhaps unable, to deal freely with the Italian provinces. On the other hand, if the Germanic Powers gained the victory they would be the masters of Europe, and could tear up as many scraps of paper as they pleased. Italy wanted her claims paid cash down. A promissory note was not worth taking.

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Sonnino was rapidly coming round to the conclusion that the prospect of an agreement was hopeless, and a rupture inevitable. He consented, however, to listen to the Austrian proposals as to a

cession of territory and to formulate his own. Baron Burian, a little shaken by the persistence of the Roman Government, announced that Austria would be prepared to make over the town of Trent and some part of the adjacent district, with due regard to the strategical interests of the Monarchy.

This concession looked extremely meagre beside the Italian claims which were set forth in detail by the Foreign Minister in an important despatch on April 8. He proposed that the whole of the Trentino, with the frontiers which were those of the Kingdom of Italy in 1811, should be surrendered. The new international boundary would start from Mount Cevedale near the Swiss frontier, pass between Meran and Botzen, through the Dolomites on the right bank of the Avisio, and include Cortina and the Ampezzo. Eastwards Italy was to have the Carnia summits, the Isonzo line to Tolmino, Gorizia and Gradisca, and the Carso ridge, with Monfalcone, and the sea-board as far as Nabresina about ten miles from Trieste. That city itself, with its surrounding district, including Capo d'Istria and Pirano, was to be constituted an independent and autonomous State. Italy was to receive the Dalmatian islands, Lissa, Curzola, Lesina, and several others. Austria would recognise Italy's full sovereignty over Vallona, and such of the hinterland as was required for its secure possession ;

and she was to "cease completely to interest herself in Albania."

The ceded territories were to be delivered immediately, and Trieste and its *enclave* forthwith evacuated by Austro-Hungarian troops. Italy would assume a quota of the public debts of the surrendered districts, and would pay two hundred million lire in gold as compensation for Imperial property and Crown rights in them. She would undertake to remain neutral during the continuance of the European war, and would accept the proposed agreement in full satisfaction of all her claims under the provisions of Article VII of the Tripartite Treaty.<sup>1</sup>

It was an ambitious programme, and was not in the least likely to be accepted by the Austrians unless they were really convinced that Italy would resort to force. So far they were not. Baron Burian refused to believe that the danger was imminent. He summarily rejected all the proposals in Sonnino's despatch, and replied that the utmost he could promise would be some slight addition to the territory offered in the Trentino. He said plainly to the ambassador that Italy would not fight. "Baron Burian, as he has several times given me to understand, cannot yet realise the necessity in which the Royal Italian

<sup>1</sup> *Italian Green Book*, No. 64.

Government might find itself, in the event of its demands not being integrally accepted, of going to war with Austria and Germany.”<sup>1</sup>

Eight days later, on May 3, the Italian Government broke off the negotiations. In a final despatch Sonnino pointed out that the Austrian Government had ignored the provisions and the intention of the treaty of alliance, which was meant to be a guarantee of peace. “Austria-Hungary, in the summer of 1914, without coming to any agreement with Italy, without even giving her the least intimation, and without taking any notice of the counsels of moderation addressed to her, notified to Serbia the ultimatum of the 23rd of July, which was the cause and the point of departure of the present European conflagration. Austria-Hungary, by disregarding the obligations imposed by the Treaty, profoundly disturbed the Balkan *status quo*, and created a situation by which she alone should profit to the detriment of interests of the greatest importance which her ally had so often affirmed and proclaimed.”

This breach of the Convention by one of the parties to it released the other from its obligations.

So flagrant a violation of the letter and the spirit of the treaty not only justified Italy's refusal to place herself on the side of her allies, in a war provoked

<sup>1</sup> The Duke d'Avarna to the Minister for Foreign Affairs April 25, 1915, *Green Book*, No. 74.



without previous notice to her, but at the same time deprived the alliance of its essential character and its *raison d'être*.

Even the compact of friendly neutrality for which the treaty provides was compromised by this violation. Reason and sentiment alike agree in preventing friendly neutrality from being maintained when one of the allies has recourse to arms for the purpose of realising a programme diametrically opposed to the vital interests of the other ally, interests the safeguarding of which constituted the principal reason for the alliance itself.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the Foreign Minister added, Italy had endeavoured to come to an arrangement which might satisfy her "legitimate national aspirations," and "reduce the disparity" in the position of the two states in the Adriatic. Austria had refused everything but "an insufficient concession of territory in the Trentino," only to take effect at a future indeterminate epoch. The Italian Government had therefore renounced all hope of coming to an agreement. Italy from that moment would "resume her complete liberty of action"; and she would regard her treaty with Austria "as cancelled and henceforth without effect." The Triplice had ceased to exist.

<sup>1</sup> *Italian Green Book*, No. 76.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WELDING OF THE NATION

WAR IN SIGHT—PRINCE VON BÜLOW'S MISSION—  
THE VILLA MALTA—A NETWORK OF INTRIGUE—  
GERMANISTS AND GIOLITTIANI—THE GREAT PARLIAM-  
ENTARY PLOT—FORGETTING THE PEOPLE  
—CHANGE IN POPULAR SENTIMENT—REVULSION  
AGAINST GERMAN CRIMES—BELGIUM AND THE  
“ LUSITANIA ”—AGITATION IN THE TOWNS—THE  
QUARTO FESTIVAL—D'ANNUNZIO—HIS SPEECHES  
AT GENOA—EVENTS IN ROME—THE DICTATOR  
AT WORK—MAJORITY AGAINST THE GOVERN-  
MENT ORGANISED—CABINET RESIGNS (MAY 13)  
—RETAINED IN OFFICE (MAY 16)—THE GREAT  
MAY DAYS IN ROME—D'ANNUNZIO AS TRIBUNE  
OF THE PEOPLE—GROWING EXCITEMENT—THE  
GIOLITTIANI COWED—SITTING OF PARLIAMENT  
(MAY 20)—COLLAPSE OF THE NEUTRALIST PLOT  
—MINISTERIAL TRIUMPH—WAR DECLARED—  
RESIGNATION OF SALANDRA (JUNE 1916)—  
COALITION CABINET—WHAT THE WAR MAY DO  
FOR ITALY—LOCAL AND SECTIONAL DIVISIONS  
ERASED—THE PROMISE OF THE FUTURE

**T**HE despatch of the third of May spelt war ; but  
in Vienna and Berlin they would not yet  
believe it. The statesmen of the Ballplatz and the

Wilhelmstrasse had been left in no uncertainty as to the views of Signor Salandra and Baron Sonnino ; but they persisted in thinking that Sonnino and Salandra were not in reality masters of the situation. Their confidential agents continued to assure them that the Consulta, the Italian Cabinet, could not carry Parliament with it in going to extremities with Austria, and would not dare to defy it. The boss of Italian politics, in spite of the diatribes of the newspapers and the jeers of the mob, was still alive and still powerful. The Giolittian party could be relied upon to upset the ministry before the crisis reached its final stage ; in which case the administration would again pass into the hands, either of the Dictator himself, or of one of his henchmen who could be trusted to defeat the plans of the interventionists. Baron von Macchio, the Austrian ambassador in Rome, wrote to his employers in this sense. So, though with somewhat waning confidence, did the special German envoy, Prince von Bülow.

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The story of German diplomacy in the neutral countries, during the war, if it could be written in full, would be one of the strangest contributions ever made to the history of human error. It is a catalogue of amazing adventures, incalculable perversities and dark intrigue of plot and

counterplot, ingenious stratagem, pertinacious effort, and shameless corruption, beyond the imagination of the hardiest romancer. Bernstorff and Dernburg in America, with their Papens and Boy-Eds, their forged documents, their underground interviews, their shady agents with false names and false whiskers, Kühlmann feeding the Dutch journalists with fictitious German victories, Schenk in Athens with his crew of Levantine spies and cosmopolitan bravoës—all help to make up a wild combination of melodrama, farce, and tragedy, ending invariably in failure and disgrace. But of all these abortive missions the most striking and resplendent was that of Prince von Bülow in Rome, and of all the failures his was the most conspicuous and dramatic.

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Bülow was sent to Rome as the special mandatory, the *missus dominicus*, of the German Emperor in December, 1914, when the friction between Austria and Italy was increasing, and it seemed that some Teutonic soothing syrup was required to allay the irritation. The emissary was well chosen. The ex-Chancellor was the most distinguished public man in the German Empire, its only living statesman who had some European reputation. He was besides a student and a political theorist, who had written books which had been

widely read, a diplomatist familiar with all the courts of Europe, esteemed and popular in the most exclusive circles of most of the capitals, an admirable linguist who could pay compliments and make speeches in half a dozen languages, a grand seigneur who had the entrée to sovereigns and princes, and withal a genial man of the world who knew how to make himself agreeable to serviceable professors and useful journalists as well as to duchesses and cabinet ministers.

This dignified and cultured personage would naturally be welcomed in Rome ; for he had close relations with the highest aristocratic society in Italy, his wife was an Italian lady of rank, he had passed much of his time in the country since his retirement from the Chancellorship, he was understood to be deeply interested in Italian literature and art. Germany could have hardly paid her two allies a higher compliment than by sending this great gentleman to mediate between them.

The Prince, however, did not confine himself to the almost futile task of trying to get Austria to buy off with delusory concessions so clear-sighted and cool-headed a negotiator as Sidney Sonnino. He was a special envoy of a peculiarly special kind ; for his real mission was to stimulate all the Germanic influences in Italy and to focus them upon neutrality.

He went about the task with a Teutonic



attention to detail, and an entirely Teutonic unscrupulousness. Every device that ingenuity could suggest was employed to gain over those who could assist the Germanic propaganda. At his splendid mansion on the Pincian Hill, the Villa Malta, the ambassador entertained Roman society with sumptuous hospitality. He was himself rich, and the resources of the Imperial exchequer were behind him. The German Emperor, said a nationalist newspaper bitterly, seemed to think with Philip of Macedon that there was no fortress too strong to be breached by an ass laden with gold. The stream flowed bounteously from the ambassadorial palace and fertilised many waste places.

The Villa Malta became the centre of a whole network of intrigue, woven to counteract the nationalist movement, and to tie the hands of the ministry. All the pro-German forces were mobilised to fight against a rupture with Austria. The Roman nobility, the financiers and manufacturers, the leading Catholics of the "black" tincture, the socialists, the neutralists, were loaded with attentions. Every effort was made to persuade doubting persons of influence that a quarrel with Austria would lead to a quarrel with Germany, and that a quarrel with Germany would plunge Italy into economic ruin. Items of "exclusive" information were pressed upon independent

journalists who could not have been safely tempted with coarser seductions. The Vatican pro-German wing, and its inspired press, were brought into the firing line under the German agent Erzberger, and the Austrian Monsignor Gerlach ; and the Hotel de Russie, where the daily conclaves of these tonsured conspirators were held, became an annexe of the Villa Malta. They were no more particular in their methods than their friend from Prussia. The Catholic mob of the Roman purlieus was organised and incited to deeds of violence in case its services might be required.

Strange scenes were enacted at the palace on the Pincian. In one saloon polite conversation would be held with ladies of fashion ; in another apartment newspaper correspondents might be fed with the copy of confidential documents which had not yet been submitted to the Foreign Office ; in another the magnates of the Banca Commerciale sat in serious discussion with pro-German mayors, political priests, and socialist agitators ; and somewhere on the premises it was said that pistols and bludgeons were being handed out to those faithful sons of the Church who were ready to interrupt neutralist meetings and break the heads of patriotic orators.

Some of the highest in the land, as well as the lowest, were the objects of the envoy's personal attention. He took advantage of his rank and

his mission from the Kaiser to go direct to the King and make suggestions and proposals to him without the knowledge of His Majesty's ministers: a gross breach of diplomatic and constitutional etiquette for which in other times he would have been handed his passports.

And the "special" ambassador went even further. He endeavoured to prejudice the sovereign himself against his constitutional advisers, and insinuated that no real progress could be made in the negotiations with Austria unless they were entrusted to more conciliatory hands. He tried to bring influence to bear upon other members of the Royal House, including Queen Margherita, the widow of King Humbert. But the Queen Mother was deeply, though as befitted her station, quietly, sympathetic with the national aspirations. Margaret of Savoy is the descendant of a line of soldier-kings, and the daughter of the soldier-prince whose statue on his falling horse in the Piazza Solferino at Turin recalls Novara, that day of unavailing Piedmontese valour and Austrian triumph. If rumour can be trusted, she received Prince von Bülow's approaches in a manner worthy of her ancestry.

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Nothing could exceed the cleverness of this Prussian strategy except its stupidity. For it was

after all extremely foolish. It was based on that ignorance of human nature, and that colossal misunderstanding of national psychology, which lie at the root of Germany's undoing. The Prussian ruling ring mistook the temper of Italy as they mistook that of the British Empire, of the United States, of France, of Belgium. Bülow should have known that a high-spirited nation like Italy would not look with patience on the attempts of a foreign government to interfere with its internal politics, and to manipulate its domestic affairs. If the Prince and his associates were gaining over some Italians by intrigue, bribery, and cajolment, they were disgusting many others.

The German envoy's indecent activity, and his outrageous plotting against the ministry in office, contrasted with the dignified reticence and genuine, though unostentatious, friendliness of the ambassadors from the Western Powers. Sir Rennell Rodd, with admirable tact and discretion, refrained from any attempt to intrude himself into the critical *pourparlers* with Austria, though he made it clear that Italy could rely upon the friendship of Britain when the time came to put it to the test.

England owes much to Sir Rennell for his conduct in those critical months; as France does to M. Camille Barrère, who has seen the work of a lifetime crowned by a restoration of good relations between the country of his birth and the country which has

so long been his second home. While the Villa Malta was seething and bubbling, quiet conversations were going on between Rome, London, Paris, and Petrograd; and the day after the delivery of Sonnino's despatch, cancelling the Triple Alliance, an understanding was arrived at between Italy and the Entente Powers.

The fact was probably known to Bülow and Macchio; but still they did not lose all hope. They could always count upon Parliament and the man behind Parliament. The Villa Malta yet believed that it had the majority of the deputies in its pocket. The old Dictator came up to Rome from his country house, and proceeded to arrange his plan of campaign. When Parliament reassembled the ministry would be defeated by a vote of the House, and would of course resign. The King might be chagrined; but His Majesty had been brought up in the strictest school of constitutional monarchy, and he would bow to the mandate of the Legislature. No doubt was felt on that point.

No doubt was entertained either as to the solidarity of the anti-ministerial *bloc*. Apart from the Giolittian train-band it was thought that many of the independent members would shrink from the risk of war with Austria; and measures had been taken to work upon their feelings. It was whispered about that Austria was only too willing



to reopen the door which Sonnino had slammed fast. So at this late hour Bülow suddenly came forward with the intimation that Austria was prepared to reopen negotiations, and was ready to offer much more generous terms than those she had previously defined as her ultimate limit. These would include : (1) Surrender of Trentino territory so as to comprehend all Italian-speaking districts ; (2) The Isonzo frontier to be so drawn as to give Gorizia to Italy ; (3) Two Dalmatian islands ; (4) Trieste to be an autonomous administrative district, and its inhabitants exempted from military service ; (5) Freedom of action in Albania and recognition of Italian occupation of Vallona ; (6) Enlarged commercial and tariff facilities for Italian trade.

These extensive concessions did not even yet meet the full Italian demand. But they were a striking *volte-face* after the uncompromising attitude of Burian ; and if they had been honestly tendered some months earlier they would probably have been accepted, and there might have been no Austro-Italian war. They were not meant to be accepted. They were brought forward merely to embarrass the Cabinet and confuse the deputies.

This is clear enough from the manner in which they were promulgated. A type-written draft of the proposed treaty, on the basis of these Austrian concessions, was placed in the hands of deputies

and newspaper correspondents several days before it was communicated to the Italian ministers.<sup>1</sup> The document was not intended for them, but drawn up, as Baron von Macchio afterwards admitted, in order that "the game of MM. Salandra, Sonnino, and Martini could be frustrated." Hesitating patriots could be asked if it were worth while to plunge into war with a Power which was showing itself so reasonable, so eager to come to terms, if only an aggressive and wrong-headed Consulta could be got out of the way.

So it seemed that after all the pro-Germanists might prevail. Prince von Bülow and his colleague had laboured hard ; they had laid their plans carefully ; they had undoubtedly a large body of factitious, and some genuine, opinion on their side ; they thought they had won over most of the financiers, much of the aristocracy, the clergy, the Curia, many of the military men, and the controlling element in politics. They had remembered many important factors in the problem. But in their reckoning they had omitted one. They had forgotten the People.

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Popular opinion in Italy had been passing through a swift evolution in the preceding few months. At first, as I have pointed out, the Italian people were

<sup>1</sup> Dillon, *From the Triple to the Quadruple Alliance*, p. 216.

not profoundly interested in the European War, and were mainly anxious to keep out of it. They did not love Austria ; but they had no strong feeling against Germany, and no special sympathy with the Allies ; and they were in an open mind as to the rights and wrongs of the quarrel. But gradually the awakening had come, as the moral consciousness of the nation began to be stirred by the crimes of Germany, and the national aspirations were crystallised by the energy of the interventionist writers. The old passions of the *Resorgimento* quickened, and were fanned to fire by the growing anger against the brutality of the Teutonic despotisms.

The rape and robbery of Belgium roused all that was generous in Italy, and the indignant sympathy grew when Maeterlinck, and other eloquent Belgian missionaries, thrilled Italian ears with the appalling tale of their country's wrongs. As the catalogue of German atrocities lengthened out the popular emotion rose higher. The *Lusitania* outrage set more cheeks aflame in Italy than in Britain itself ; for the highway of the Atlantic is more familiar to Italians, whose sons cross it by the half-million every year, than it is to Englishmen. And so it was, in the winter and spring of 1915, while Sonnino was coldly arguing out his claim with Vienna on the barest juridical and technical grounds, that the tide was rising out of doors. Many Italians were

beginning to think it might be worth while to fight, not only that Italy might be rendered greater, but also that the world might be delivered from the barbarians of the North. And the vague sentiment was shaping itself into a desire to avenge the old wrongs and the new wrongs alike on the secular enemy, Austria.

Excitement took tangible form in the great cities during the spring. There was some serious rioting in Genoa, Milan, and in Rome itself. The Government, determined to hold the balance level, repressed these manifestations sternly. Cavalry was called out, shots were fired, lives were lost.

But the popular passion did not abate; and the nationalist newspapers, growing bolder day by day, stimulated it with vehement attacks on the Giolittians, on the pro-Germans, on the sycophants of Austria. Applausive crowds gathered before the British, French, and Russian embassies, and the police had difficulty in saving the windows of the legations of the Central Powers.

Prominent Giolittians were mobbed in the streets, and were warned not to show themselves in public places. Soldiers and officers in uniform were cheered, and patriotic sentences mingled in the *graffiti* with trenchant jests against the Emperor Francis Joseph, and ferocious epigrams upon the peacemongers.

The public did not know exactly how the negotiations were going ; but it suspected the truth, and by the beginning of May the people of the large towns were restless, uneasy, simmering with passion deeply felt though incoherently expressed, only needing a strong word of clear leadership to launch them into action.

The Cabinet, reticent under its responsibilities, could not give the word. Perhaps the King might have done so ; and it had been thought that he would seize the opportunity which offered itself on the fifth of May. For on that day there was to be a fête at the Quarto, the rocky cove on the Mediterranean shore near Genoa, whence Garibaldi and his "Thousand" had set out, on May 5, 1860, on the expedition for the liberation of Sicily. The King was to have been present, and many hoped, and a few feared, that the occasion would be chosen for an historic declaration that would have decided Italy's destiny.

But the crisis was still too grave for such a demonstration ; and at the last moment it was announced that His Majesty would not attend the fêtes. He sent instead a letter, in which he recalled the memory of Victor Emmanuel II, and paid a tribute to that of the hero who had set out from the Quarto "with an immortal daring towards an immortal goal." It was a sufficiently clear index to the thoughts



passing in the royal mind, and its intention was evident.

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But if the "solving word," for which the country was waiting, could be uttered neither by the monarch nor the ministers, it was not left unspoken. The hour had found the man; and the man was neither a prince, nor a politician, but a poet. Gabriele d'Annunzio had been invited to take part in the Quarto celebrations. He arrived at Genoa on the 4th of May, and on the same evening he delivered the first of that series of impassioned orations in which he poured into words of fire the vague thoughts stirring in so many minds, and set Italian hearts beating with a new resolve, Italian eyes shining with a clearer purpose. *Per la più grande Italia* is the title which D'Annunzio has given to the published collection of his speeches,<sup>1</sup> and the name is rightly chosen. For it was these harangues which vitalised the idea of the Greater Italy, and set moving towards one definite point the tide that washed away the whole web of Germanic intrigue and domestic treachery.

Strange that it should have been left to a poet, an artist, a worshipper of ideal beauty and literary form, to bring to nought the machinations of the

<sup>1</sup> *Per la più grande Italia: orazioni e messaggi di Gabriele d'Annunzio* (Milan, 1915).

Bülows and the Giolittis ! Stranger that it should have fallen to D'Annunzio to play the part of the apostle of a national revival ! In Italy, it is true, a poet speaks to a people prepared in advance to listen to him with reverence and attention ; for his art is taken seriously in these Latin countries, where it is not the fashion to treat him with amused tolerance as a being a little lower than the stock-brokers, an eccentric who chooses to spend his time in an unpractical vocation with, as a rule, " no money in it." Poets and literary artists have before now in France and Italy beaten the men of action in their own fields. But D'Annunzio had had no such long experience of affairs as Lamartine, when the author of the *Méditations* was placed at the head of the Provisional Government of 1848, nor had he the same popular and authoritative personality. His appearance in the political arena was almost as surprising as if, let us say, Browning or Swinburne had come forward on the platforms of mid-Victorian England to be the leader of the Tory democracy.

D'Annunzio, weaving his fancies into delicate and finely wrought verse, had been long away from Italy, wearied of the materialism by which he believed the country was obsessed. But he was the inheritor of the tradition of Carducci, and had been proclaimed many years before by the patriot-poet as destined to receive from him the torch that

lighted the Italian spirit on its path to nationhood and greatness. Young no longer, his faith in the destiny of Italy was still glowing with the fervour of youth. He had always believed that another War of Liberation must come : he had watched it coming he said in February, 1915, for a quarter of a century. Now that it was hovering close upon the threshold, he saw that it was time to proclaim its advent in clear and certain accents. He set the trumpet to his lips and blew ; and the note rang high and thrilling through the mists that still drifted about the airs of Italy.

Blessed are those to whom most has been given, for they can give the most and dare the most.

Blessed are the youths, the sons of noble mothers, who have come to their manhood, chaste in spirit, sound and temperate in body.

Blessed are those who in hope and faith have awaited this hour, not wasting their strength but hardening it by soldierly discipline.

Blessed are those who have spurned from them vain and empty passions, and now, with virgin ardour, can yield themselves to this great love of country, the first love and the last.

Blessed are they who have plucked from their breasts some rooted rancour, and lay it as an offering on the altar of the nation.

Blessed are those who, after struggling against the inevitable event, now bow in silence before the supreme necessity, and are resolved to press forward with the vanguard.

Blessed are the young men who hunger and thirst after honour, for their desires shall be fulfilled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall staunch heroic blood and bind glorious wounds.

Blessed are the pure in heart, blessed those who will return with victory, for they shall behold the vision of a New Rome, the brow of Dante crowned afresh, the ineffable beauty of triumphant Italy.<sup>1</sup>

These speeches at the Quarto celebrations gave fierce impetus to the nationalist wave now swelling towards the flood. On May 12 the poet arrived in Rome to carry on the campaign there. Meanwhile events of deep interest had been occurring in the capital, and the political crisis was rapidly approaching its climax. Strongly as all the symptoms pointed to war, the Austro-German agents and their friends did not yet feel themselves beaten. The King might be against them, the People, the Press, the Poet. But the Parliament might still be theirs. Their trump card remained to be played, and they proposed to play it.

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The Chamber was to reassemble on the twentieth of May. During the preceding ten days Signor Giolitti had been busy. The members of his party had been summoned to Rome, and the days were

<sup>1</sup> D'Annunzio, *Per la più grande Italia* (speech at Genoa, May 5, 1915).

filled with the meetings of private conclaves and intimate councils. Lobbying, wire-pulling, confidential discussions went on with feverish activity; automobiles were at the gates of the Villa Malta by night and day; Macchio's draft treaty, and other curious documents, were circulating; the air was mephitic with intrigue. Ministers were in anxious conference with their followers and party experts. They learnt that 320 out of the 508 deputies had left their cards on Signor Giolitti as a token of their fidelity to him. So there was no likelihood of a Government majority. It seemed clear that the Giolittians would carry the day. The *bloc* was still solid. When ministers met the House they would be defeated.

Salandra felt that the risk could not be taken. Resignation in the face of an adverse vote in the Chamber would be a victory for Austria and the reactionaries, a rebuff to the Entente Powers, with whom the ministry had just come to an agreement, and an undoing of all Sonnino's laborious diplomacy. To remain in office, and to carry on the business of the country with war imminent, under the fetters of a hostile majority in Parliament, would be impossible. A dissolution and general election, in the tempestuous state of public opinion, might lead to danger, perhaps to disaster. Already the cry of "War or Revolution?" had been heard. The atmosphere was electric, wild



words had been uttered, desperate deeds might be done. It was openly said that if the Giolittians came into power D'Annunzio would be arrested and shot.

What genuine warrant there was for the stories of this kind that were flying about I do not know. But it was certainly believed that the Germanising party was ready to take violent measures against its leading opponents.

The fact was brought to my notice in a curious fashion. More than a year after the events here narrated, I was driving in his automobile with an Italian friend, who was the head of a great manufacturing firm, and had taken a prominent part on the nationalist side in the spring of 1915. My hand happened to come into contact with something round and hard protruding from a pocket in the side of the car, and I pulled forth a heavy service revolver.

We were passing through a beautiful and peaceful country far outside the war area, and I expressed my surprise at the presence of this weapon. My friend with a smile said: "Oh, that is a legacy from May of last year. As you know, Prince von Bülow's and Baron von Macchio's friends had good reason not to love me. I was living outside Rome, and had to drive along some lonely roads on my way in and out; and from what I heard I deemed it as well to be prepared for hostile visita-

tion. So I bought this little toy, and got another for my chauffeur."

"You really think an attempt might have been made on your life?"

"Yes," he replied; "I think so seriously. And I may tell you this: if the Giolittians had come into office on May 20, I should have been over the Swiss frontier the same night. For if I had remained in Italy I am pretty sure that I should have been arrested within four-and-twenty hours on some trumped-up charge or other, and in that case——"

"Yes," I said, "in that case?"

"In that case I do not think my life would have been worth many days' purchase."

I tell this tale as 'twas told to me. It is at least an indication of the tension and bitterness of feeling which prevailed while the question of peace or war was in the balance.

Ministers declined to precipitate the issue by meeting Parliament in office, and on May 13 they collectively offered their resignation to the King.

For a moment it seemed as if the neutralists had triumphed. But they did not reckon either with the King or the People. Victor Emmanuel rose to the emergency, and showed that he had inherited the spirit and the courage of his grandfather. He sent for Giolitti and asked him what he thought should be done. The Dictator suggested

that the task of forming a ministry should be entrusted to the President of the Chamber, a respectable member of his own party. The King was disinclined for any such experiment. He believed that the resigning ministers responded to the better feeling of the country and the needs of the hour. He knew that war with Austria was coming, and he determined that it should be conducted by men who could enter upon it with conviction. He declined to accept the resignation of the Salandra Cabinet, and gave its members to understand that they had his full authority to do everything the necessities of the situation might demand.

But there was still that adverse Parliamentary majority to be dealt with. Would it not stand firm on May 20? Bülow and his friends still hoped that it would. But they had omitted, as I have said, the Roman people from their calculations; they did not allow for that effervescence of the public spirit which at last brought the anti-nationalist opposition to its knees.

In those May days, between the 12th and 20th, the Eternal City "found itself," and passed through another memorable phase of its history. On the evening of the twelfth D'Annunzio was to deliver his first speech, and a mighty multitude crowded the Forum, and craned their necks from balconies and windows, to hear him. And that night, and for the seven nights that followed, the orator

poured forth to the listening Romans his torrents of impassioned prose, vibrating with the memories of the past and the promise of the future.

Those were wondrous days and nights in Rome, when the Romans, under the lucent evening sky, gathered in their tens of thousands to hang upon the words of this new Tribune of the People. Well might onlookers recall immortal and tumultuous scenes set upon the same stage; it seemed to M. Jacques Bainville<sup>1</sup> that another Antony had arisen to incite "the stones of Rome to rise and mutiny."

When D'Annunzio made his first speech from the balcony of the Hotel Regina, opposite the palace of the Queen-Mother (who, says M. Bainville, heard the oration from her windows), he sought to inspire his hearers by recalling to them the glories of their history, and the great deeds of the heroes who had fought for Italian freedom. But on the 13th, when the plot against the national Government seemed for a moment to have some prospect of success, he struck a sterner note, and denounced the agents and the clients of the Germanic envoys as traitors to the country. Invective so fiercely barbed, and so directly aimed, can seldom have been heard on a modern platform. The Catiline of the pro-Austrian conspiracy was assailed with Ciceronian eloquence and in terms of startling plainness.

The harangue of May 14 reads like the address

<sup>1</sup> Bainville, *La guerre et l'Italie*, p. 253.

to a jury in a trial for treason, and it is almost so styled by the author in its published form <sup>1</sup>—"the public accusation delivered before the Assembly of the People." He arrested the attention of his excited audience at once with words of deep meaning and menace. "Lend me your ears," he said; "I come to tell you terrible things, things you do not know. We are here to pass judgment on a crime of high treason, and to denounce to the scorn and to the vengeance of good citizens the criminal and his confederates. What I am to tell you is no flight of rhetoric, but a clear statement of authenticated facts."

He went on to disclose—no doubt from information given him by the Foreign Office—what had been commonly rumoured but had not yet been officially revealed: that the Salandra Cabinet had denounced the Triple Alliance treaty with Austria and had declared it null and void. And thereafter the Government had entered into engagements with "another group of nations," engagements grave and definite, confirmed by an exchange of strategic plans and projects of combined military action. That, added the speaker, is the truth beyond contradiction. "I had absolute confirmation of it before I quitted France, where the officers of our General Staff and Admiralty had already arrived and were at work."

<sup>1</sup> *L'Accusa pubblica pronunciata nell' adunanza del popolo.*



So, he continued, we have, on the one hand, a treaty abolished ; on the other an agreement established. On the one side, the country's honour vindicated ; on the other the country's honour pledged. The fusion of hearts, inaugurated at the Quarto, was about to be accomplished. Calm resolve was superseding dissension, excitement, and agitation ; the army was brave and confident ; the country inspired with patriotism and hope.

And now what has happened ? The notable achievement of many months of arduous preparation is to be nullified by a base and sudden attack, conceived, inspired, directed by the foreigner. Its agents are an Italian politician, Italian members of Parliament, trafficking with the foreigner, placing themselves at the service of the foreigner, to abase, to enslave, to degrade Italy, for the benefit of the foreigner.

These facts are palpable, undeniable. And now listen. The chief of these malefactors, that man whose very soul is an organ of cold mendacity moved by trickery and cunning, the leader of this vile enterprise, knew that the old treaty had been abolished, and that the new engagement had been concluded, and that both acts had been performed with the consent of the King.

So then he has betrayed the King, he has betrayed the country.

Against the King, against the country, he is the servant of his alien employers. He is guilty of treason. That is what we must explain to the country, what we must imprint upon the national consciousness.

The country is in danger. The country is on the

brink of ruin. To save it from disaster and irreparable disgrace all of us must give ourselves to its service and gird on our arms.

A ministry constituted by Prince von Bülow is not likely to be approved by the King of Italy. But, come what may, the servitors of Prince von Bülow will not desist from their activity. So long as they are at large and at liberty they will strive to poison the life of Italy, to smirch and befoul all that is best and noblest among us.

For this reason, I repeat, every good citizen must be a soldier to wage relentless war against the enemy within our household ; for him there must be no truce, no quarter.

The Parliament of Italy will reopen on the twentieth of May. It is the anniversary of the memorable march of Garibaldi, the march upon Palermo.

Let us celebrate this anniversary by barring the entrance to the lackeys of the Villa Malta, and hounding them back to their master.

And in the Parliament of Italy free men, released from these ignoble associates, will proclaim the freedom and the consummated unity of the country.

The "lackeys of the Villa Malta" should have known that their game was up, when they felt these blasts of winged fire, and saw how the army of listeners rocked with uncontrollable emotion under them.

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In truth their deep-laid scheme flickered out in the flame of the popular passion. The city

was ablaze in that eventful week. Cavalry patrolled the streets, but they could barely keep order, and were powerless to repress the moving throngs which shouted "Death to Giolitti," and howled defiance at the *Tedeschi*. The pro-Germanists became seriously alarmed. It was not safe for the more prominent of them to be recognised in the streets. Erzberger, the Prussian agent at the Vatican, terrified by the crowd about his hotel, fled in a panic to the German Embassy. Well-known Giolittian deputies were advised by the police to remain in their houses, and to make their way to the Parliament House on the 20th as unobtrusively as possible. Some of them spent the preceding night on Montecitorio, and gained access to the Chamber by the side entrances. The whole quarter was under military occupation, and strict precautions were taken against any demonstration of violence. But Rome was in a tumult of hope and passion. Shops were closed, and Italian and Allied flags, with patriotic inscription, were to be seen everywhere.

The Giolittians were in a chastened and repentant mood. Meetings had been held in many towns as well as Rome. In Milan, Genoa, Turin, Naples, Palermo, Bologna, there had been great crowds, processions, cries of "Down with Austria! Down with Giolitti! *Evviva Salandra! Evviva la guerra!*" Showers of letters from their constitu-

ents had convinced the deputies that the tide was rising throughout the country. Many of them were themselves borne away by it, and were now genuinely anxious to support the King and the Cabinet. The less reputable were awed or persuaded into acquiescence. So when at length the fateful sitting began it was seen at once that a startling transformation had occurred.

In that tense and crowded Chamber there was one familiar figure missing. Signor Giolitti was not in his place; for he knew already that the machine he had constructed, and manipulated so long, was broken into fragments, and he had no mind to be a witness of the ruin. The *bloc* had gone to pieces; the Dictator's party had ceased to exist; the great parliamentary plot was dead before it had begun to live.

The House was throbbing with patriotic emotion. Salandra and Sonnino took their seats amid long salvos of acclamation from the majority that was to have swept them away in humiliation and defeat. Applause in vivid bursts punctuated the statement in which the Premier introduced the Bill conferring discretionary powers upon the Government in case of war, and swelled to a surge at the peroration which called for the fusion of all forces, and all hearts, in the common cause of the nation. Signor Boselli, the doyen of the Chamber, supported the ministerial proposal in impressive sentences.

“When the flag of Italy, the flag of Victor Emmanuel, shall wave over all Italian lands, then will all the peoples of Italy have a single heart and a single aim.”

The vote, which in effect authorised the Government to declare war, was carried by 407 against 74, the minority consisting almost entirely of socialists and a few extreme clericals. In the Senate there were only two dissentients in a House of 526.

The news spread swiftly through Rome and the city was delirious with joy. In the evening an immense torchlight procession, two hundred thousand strong, marched through the streets to the Quirinal, with the Syndic of Rome, Prince Colonna, and some of the senators, at their head. The King showed himself to the delighted multitude, his young son beside him with the tricolour in his hand. On May 23 the Government notified Baron Burian that Italy would consider herself in a state of war on the following day; and before that day was ended Italian bayonets were wet with Austrian blood.

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The Giolittians and pro-Teutons had been smitten hip and thigh, but they were not quite extinguished. They had lost the battle, but they still tried to fight a rear-guard action. For reasons which ought to be evident from what has been said



in these chapters, the formal break with Germany was long delayed; for amid the difficulties of the opening war with Austria the Government hesitated to face the financial disturbance and economic embarrassment involved in suddenly cutting through the coils of Germanic penetration.

Powerful influences and substantial resources kept some vitality in the anti-national faction even after their *débâcle* of May 20, 1915. More than a year later they got together again and sought their revenge on the high-minded Premier, who had steered Italy through the crisis of her destinies, and had found in the popular emotion the support denied by doubting friends and interested opponents.<sup>1</sup> This time, owing to an unlucky moment of indiscretion on his own part, they succeeded. In June, 1916, the country was disturbed and perplexed by the apparent success of the smashing Austrian drive down the Trentino. Signor Salandra,

<sup>1</sup> "To a modest burgher of the South of Italy, Signor Salandra, who was called but to serve as a stop-gap Premier during the ex-dictator's temporary and strategic retirement, it fell to face a tremendous issue; with indomitable courage he assumed the burden of a momentous decision. With profound insight and trust in the better self of the Italian people he appealed from the Chambers of timid politicians to the market-place, and ranged Italy against the Imperial aggressors. It was a great act of faith, and will form his worthy political epitaph. Let us never forget that it was the man-in-the-street in Italy who turned the scale in favour of the Allies."—T. OKEY, *Contemporary Review*, July, 1916, p. 38.

irritated by waspish critics, let fall a sentence which seemed to reflect upon the courage and capacity of the army. Instantly the House was in a flame. The remnants of the old *bloc*, partially reconstituted, combined with the resentful nationalists, angered by what they deemed an ungenerous attack on the soldiers, and with the socialists and the ultra-clericals, to carry a vote against the Government ; and the Prime Minister resigned.

*Et jam finis erat.* A storm of righteous indignation swept the country at this display of partisanship while the foe was at the gates. The newspapers of all shades sternly admonished the place-mongers and faction-fighters of Montecitorio to lay aside their trumpety rivalries till a more convenient season. The country cared nothing for their quarrels and their parties ; it had only one interest, and that was that the war should be waged effectively. I was myself with the army at the front at this time ; and—though soldiers are not prone to talk politics—it was easy to see that to them the Government was Cadorna and the General Staff and the Commander-in-Chief, who is the King ; and nothing mattered so long as they were properly supported and supplied with what they needed to carry on the campaign.

All the more reputable of the parliamentarians were themselves ashamed of their lapse. By common consent a Cabinet of Concentration was

formed, under the venerable Signor Boselli, and it included politicians of all shades, even high Catholics and socialists. The Minister of War remained at his post, and Sonnino retained the portfolio of Foreign Affairs. Later in the year (on August 27, 1916) the final step was taken and war was declared against Germany. Italy had now thrown herself, without reserve, into the great Alliance against militarist barbarism, and all her energies were bent upon the triumph of the common cause and the task of self-realisation and self-completion for which she had drawn the sword.

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A good deal was made in England and elsewhere of Signor Salandra's "sacred egoism" sentence, and too much stress laid upon the self-regarding motives which impelled Italy to a rupture with her former partners. Undoubtedly the Italian Government was closely, and properly, anxious to promote the national interests. But that does not alter the fact that Italy's intervention, coming when it did, was a service of the highest value to the Allied cause as a whole; and that it was boldly and chivalrously initiated at a moment when that cause seemed at a low ebb of its fortunes.

In the spring of 1915 it was the general opinion in the neutral countries that the Germanic Powers were well on their way to victory. In the West

the French and British armies were stationary, and had made no progress since the battles of the Marne and Aisne. In the East the Allies had met with what looked rather like irretrievable disaster. The Russian offensive had been smashed, the Czar's armies had been swept out of Poland with terrible losses of men and material, an Austro-German advance upon Kieff, Odessa, or even Petrograd, was considered imminent, and in many quarters it was believed that Russia could not recover from the blows inflicted upon her in time to play a further effective part in the war.

This was apparently the view of the Governments of the Central Powers, for they were taking advantage of Russia's assumed desperate position to approach her with proposals for a separate peace. These tentatives were known to the Italian Foreign Office. On March 29, 1915, the Italian ambassador at Petrograd telegraphed: "I learn from an unimpugnable source that a serious attempt at peace has been addressed to this Government by someone speaking in the name of the Austro-Hungarian Government."<sup>1</sup> Four days later there was a similar despatch from the ambassador at Berlin: "From certain indications, clearly confirmed from an authoritative source, I gather that Germany would not refuse to treat for peace with Russia."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Italian Green Book*, No. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 61.

It was in the presence of these discouraging symptoms that Italy took the decisive step. She had no certainty that the Allies would win, she faced the risk—which could not be ignored at the time—that they might be defeated. If Salandra and Sonnino were following the precedent of Cavour in the Crimean War they did so with a difference. For when Cavour sent the Sardinian troops to join those of Great Britain and France he knew that Italy stood in no danger of invasion, even if the campaign should go against the Western Powers, which seemed unlikely. But in May, 1915, Italy had to confront a still unbeaten enemy of formidable strength upon her own frontier.

Italy did not wait to intervene till victory had declared itself for the side she favoured. She took up arms while the issue still hung in the balance, and when, as many thought, the scale was inclining against her new allies.

As to the service she rendered by coming in at this juncture, it is sufficient to look back upon the course of events during the months that followed. Serbia and Montenegro were conquered and annexed, Greece was overawed, the expedition to the Dardanelles became a monumental failure, the Western Allies could not advance and were exposed to the tremendous attack at Verdun, Russia was still reorganising. What would have been the position if Austria had been free to



direct her entire force upon the Eastern front during this period? Without the diversion of so large a portion of the Austro-Hungarian armies to the Italian line it is conceivable that Russia might have been unable to resume the offensive till too late, and that Roumania could never have come into the war at all.

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To those who visited Italy in the second year of the conflict there was little sign of the agitations and cross-currents of the beginning. Of all the belligerent nations I have seen Italy seems to me the most tranquil, contented, and serenely confident. She has endured heavy losses, and is called upon to make great sacrifices; but her people have counted the cost, and they pay it resolutely, cheerfully, almost, one would say, gaily. They have no love for war, and on this one they entered with hesitating and doubtful steps; but now, I think, they feel, not only that it was necessary and right, but that it will give them some things which were wanting in the years of peace.

War is a monstrous evil; but from its furnace of pain and suffering Italy, with other nations, may emerge hardened and tempered. She will gain a larger unity, and that not merely by annexing the unredeemed territory. The war has gone far to obliterate that division of classes and localities which

was the inheritance of her troubled past. Her children have been Sardinians, Venetians, Apulians, Tuscans, Neapolitans, Sicilians, longer than they have been Italians ; they have been apt to set the old province, where their fathers were born, before the new nation to which they have themselves so lately succeeded. The trench and the battlefield have brought them together. The Piedmontese have learnt that the Southerners too are brave and strong ; the men of the South have found that they exaggerated the harshness and coldness of the Cisalpine peoples. The common effort and the common burden have crowned the edifice which the makers of Italy built up in the nineteenth century.

And the war, here as elsewhere, has brought divergent orders and sects together. We may hear less after it of that quarrel between the Church and the State which has caused unhappiness to so many devout and patriotic Italians. For if the Vatican, under the malign statesmanship of its chiefs, has been anti-national, the clergy as a whole have taken a noble part in the war. Everywhere at the front I met uniformed priests comforting and consoling the soldiers in hardship and peril ; at the hospitals and in the ambulances I saw the sisters of the religious orders ministering to the sick and dying. Three of them were killed by an Austrian bomb at one hospital I visited.

I think these things will go some way to soften sectarian animosities. The "freemasons" and socialists may be less acridly agnostic, the "blacks" less narrowly clerical. Many soldiers in all the armies are thinking more of spiritual values, and the problems of religion, than ever before; and that is true of the Italians. I found a peasant-soldier from Calabria intent upon a book at a roadside camp, and asked him what he was reading. He showed me the volume, a little paper-covered *Life of Christ—Piccola vita di Gesù per i soldati*—with many illustrations drawn from Rafael, Beato Angelico, Carlo Dolci, Tiepolo, and other masters. "Is this new to you?" I said. "Yes," he answered; "the priests did not want us to read it." "And now?" "Now they do not mind." They do not even mind them reading the Bible, for I have seen also cheap copies of the New Testament which some society or committee has been allowed to circulate among the regiments—surely a new and striking thing in this the most Catholic country but one in Europe!

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The war is for Italy one of ideas and realities. She means to emerge from it greater, stronger, more self-reliant. I hope that she will be moderate in her victory, and that her statesmen

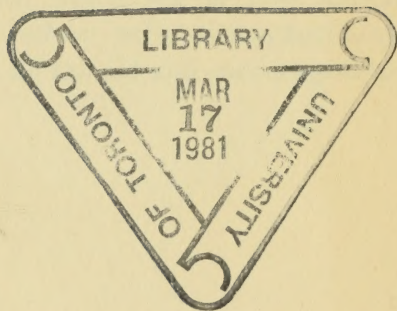
will show themselves willing to act cautiously and generously in the solution of that tangled problem of nationalities and jurisdictions which the re-settlement of South-Eastern Europe must present. It can never be settled on purely national lines ; for in those border-lands Italians, Germans, Serbs, and Slovenes are too inextricably mixed for political and racial divisions to coincide. The nationality theory may be as perilous, if pushed too far, as the dynastic or the geographical.

What Italy needs is security sufficient to develop to the full her economic resources and her national individuality ; and that she intends to obtain. She is resolved to be independent of external patronage, protection, and supervision of any kind, and to enjoy all the rights, privileges, ambitions, which belong to the greater nations of the earth. She believes herself capable of excelling, not merely in arts, science, letters, philosophy, laws, but in production, manufactures, commerce, the exploitation of waste and backward countries. She is not content that her people, so intelligent, so industrious, so capable, should be packed off year by year in shoals to form the ill-paid labour helots of wealthier communities ; she prefers that they should be kept at home to develop the riches, and intensify the vitality, of their own land. She has watched the rise of Germany from poverty and weakness to strength and industrial magnificence ;

and she believes that the Latin capacity for organisation, invention, scientific adaptation and enterprise, is not inferior to the Teutonic. She thinks she can do many of the things that Germany has done, and some things which Germany will never do ; and she means to try. It is for the great free nations, with which she is now associated, to survey her effort with sympathetic eyes, and extend to it all the aid and encouragement in their power.







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